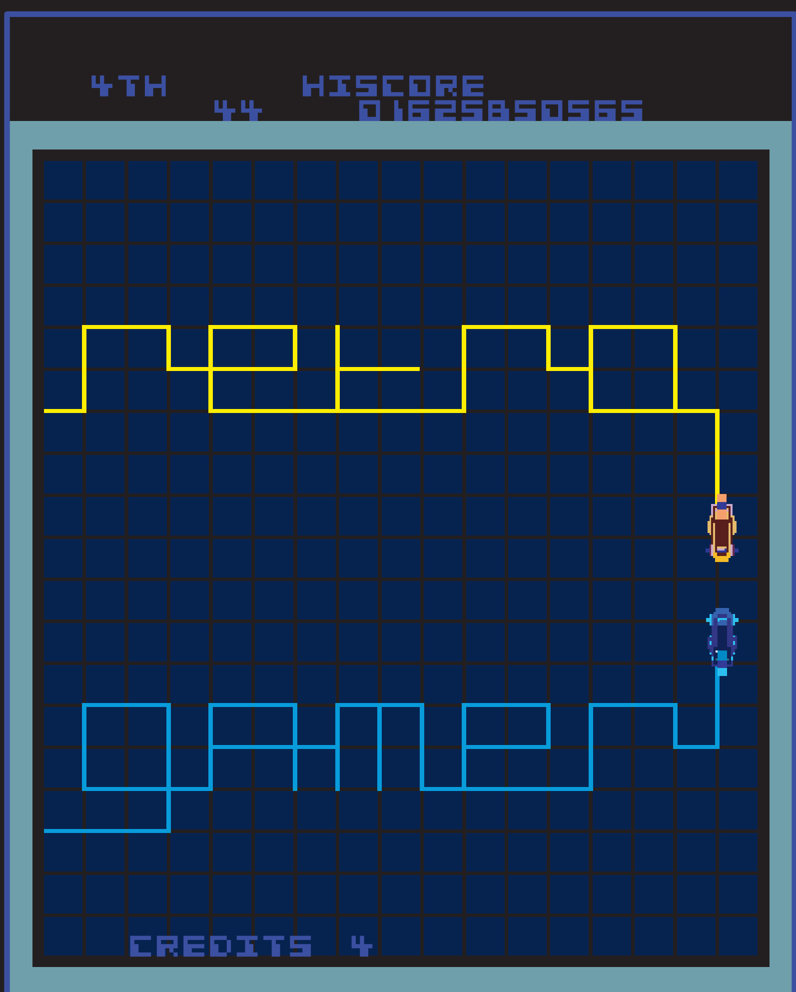
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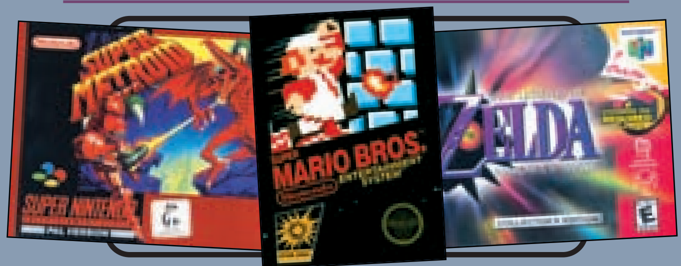
ISSUE FOUR

RETRO GAMER* ISSUE FOUR
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>SYNTAX ERROR!
>MISSING COVERDISC?
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NINTENDO'S GREATEST GAMES



GAMING GOLD ON THE NES, SNES & N64

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT TRILOGY



MIKE SINGLETON INTERVIEWED

AMSTRAD ACTION



THE CPC RANGE REVISITED

eMag

credits

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Editor =
Martyn Carroll
(martyn@livepublishing.co.uk)
Staff Writer =
Shaun Bebbington
(shaun@livepublishing.co.uk)
Art Editor =
Mat Mabe
Additonal Design =
Wendy Morgan + The Beast
Sub Editors =
Katie Hallam + Rachel White
Contributors =
Chris Abbott + Simon Brew
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>10 PRINT "hello"
>20 GOTO 10
>RUN
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hello

It's the news I'm hoping you've all been waiting for: from this issue onwards, Retro Gamer will be published monthly. That's 12 issues a year, and each one will be packed with all your favourite retro features. By Christmas we'll be up to issue 11, which is unbelievable when you think that the magazine was originally intended to be published on a quarterly basis! I'd just like to say thanks for your continued support, and here's to the rest of year. We have some first-rate features and cracking coverdiscs lined up for you.

To cope with the increased frequency, we've employed Shaun Bebbington as a full-time writer on the magazine. Shaun wrote the excellent Commodore Uncovered feature in issue 2, and he also contributes a weekly retro column to Micro Mart magazine. Shaun will be a familiar face to many scene members, and he'll be providing a number of articles with a more technical edge. Why not make him feel welcome with an email!

OK, that's the announcements over, I'll let you get stuck into the magazine. As always, keep the feedback and suggestions coming, and I'll see you next month. Oh, did I mention we're going monthly?

MARTYN CARROLL
EDITOR

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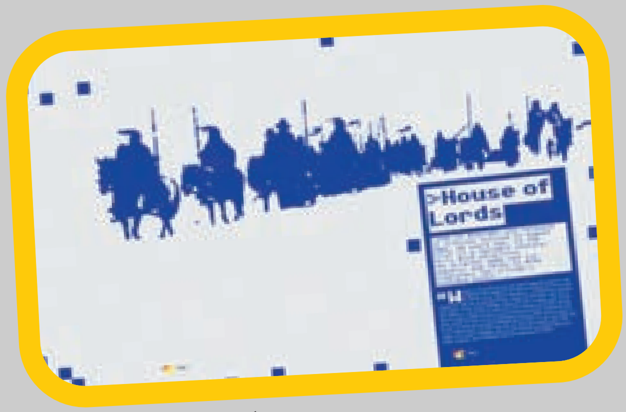
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>Nintendo's
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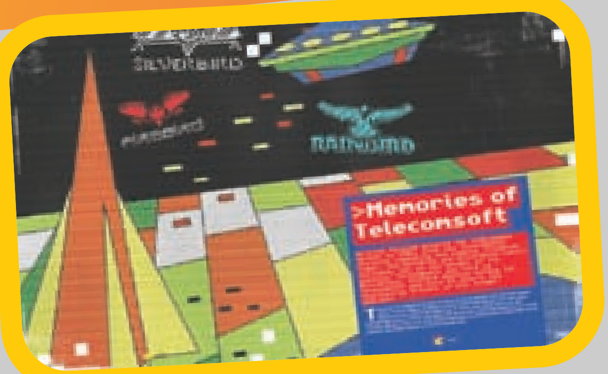

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>The
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>House of
Lords



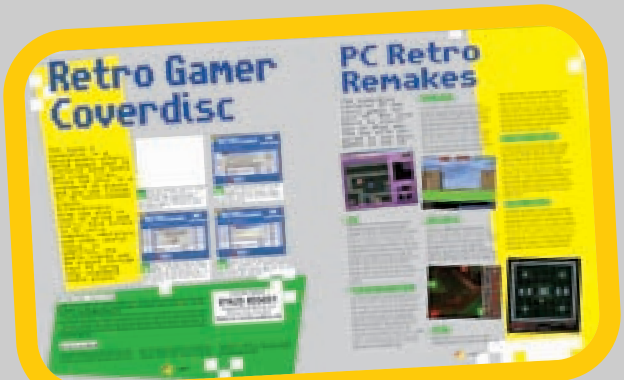

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MOVIE



>Memories of Telecomsoft



>Amstrad Action
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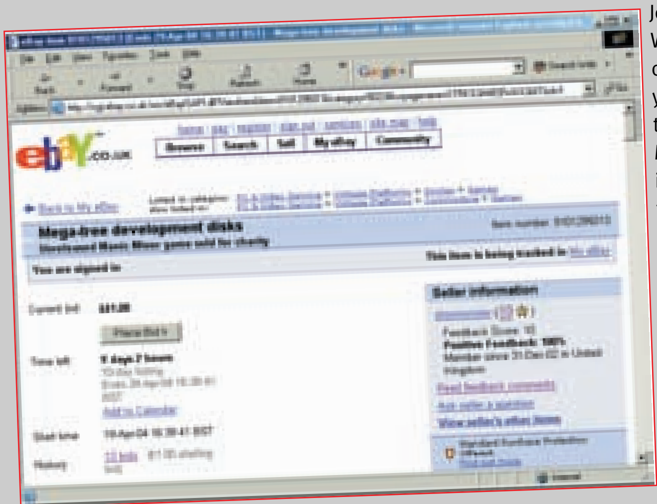
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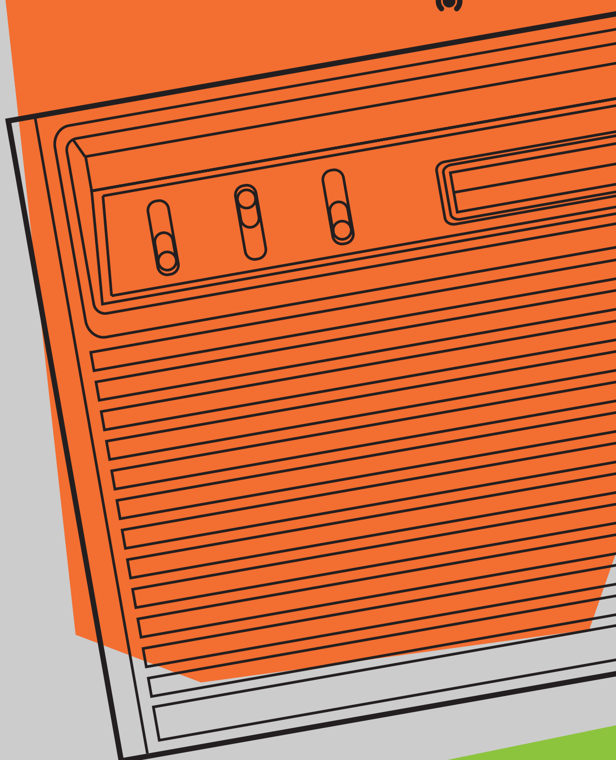
There's always something good happening in the world of retro

Missing Miner Willy Game Found!

Retro Gamer wins 'lost game' auction



Jet Set Willy 3, Miner Willy Meets the Taxman or Mega-tree. Whatever you want to call the true sequel to Manic Miner and Jet Set Willy, it's been a long lost title that retro gamers have been trying to track down for umpteen years. Well, we can reveal that the work in progress disks were recently auctioned for charity on eBay, and Retro Gamer magazine won the auction with a bid of £207.02.

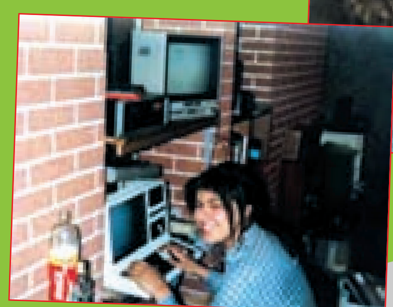


The long lost disks were discovered by Stuart Fotheringham, one of the original programmers on the Mega-tree project. To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the release of the original Jet Set Willy game, Stuart decided to put the disks up for auction on eBay and donate all the proceeds to Cancer Research.

Although the 18 disks, all 5.25in Commodore 64 format floppies, were untested by Stuart, they could hold the last remnants of any Mega-tree coding. Several of the disks have the game logo on their labels plus descriptions like 'drawings', 'sprites' and 'game routines'. Stuart acknowledges that any actual code written at the time was minimal, with most of the work revolving around the planning stages. Some of the other disks could also contain various graphics work from Stuart's time at Software Projects, Odin and Denton Design. So there could be even more gaming gold dust tucked away on these disks.

The auction started on April 19th and by the end of its tenth day, the page had amassed 6,084 hits. There was always a fear that the winning bidder would be a private collector and that the disks would disappear, never to be seen again. That certainly won't be the case now, as we're currently putting together a Mega-tree feature that will run in Retro Gamer issue five. We'll also reveal the contents of each and every disk, providing they still work of course! The disks will also be on display at this summer's Classic Gaming Expo UK. So, until next month, keep that breath baited!





The Mega-tree development team at work. Pictures used with the kind permission of Stuart Fotheringham

Fighting Combos

SNK arcade classics coming to PS2



SNK NeoGeo has announced that it will be publishing a series of special double-feature packs for the PlayStation 2. The first will feature both King of Fighters 2002 and 2003, and will be available towards the end of the year. This release complements the new King of Fighters: Maximum Impact game, the first 3D version of the popular beat-em-up.

The second pack will contain Metal Slug 4 and 5, and will appear early next year. Both packs are expected to retail at around £20. In related news, Metal Slug Advance is set to appear on the GBA, and Samurai Shodown 5 is in development for the PS2 and the Xbox.



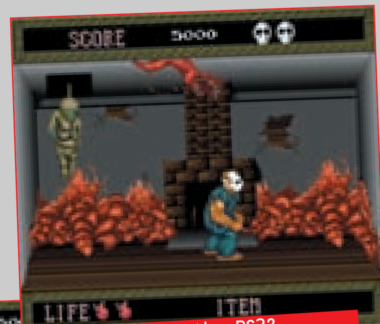
Splatterhouse For Sale?

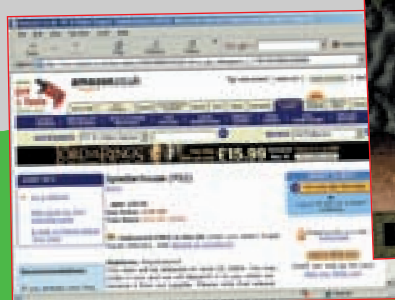
Details of PS2 update leaked



Splatterhouse, Namco's bloodthirsty slice-n-dice-em-up, seems to be coming to the PlayStation 2. There's no official news from Namco, but Amazon UK has listed the game and is currently taking pre-release orders. So it's not concrete, but Amazon rarely gets it wrong. Remember the Outrun 2-for-Xbox listing? That went live a good couple of months before Sega officially announced a home conversion of the game (see the related news item over the page). And Namco is well known for its fanchises, with the likes of Pac-Man, Ridge Racer and Tekken still being updated for the latest consoles. What does seem very unlikely is Amazon's listed release date of June 25th, 2004. The same date *next* year seems much more probable.

An 18 age rating is listed, which is hardly surprising since the original game, released in the arcades in 1988, was amazingly controversial for its time. As an anonymous poster on a Web forum pointed out: "Splatterhouse is the only game I've ever played that actually had you walking along a giant vagina/womb smashing monster foetuses with a 2x4." In fact, the TurboGrafx/PC Engine version that appeared in 1990 was the first US game to be slapped with a parental advisory label. Splatterhouse 2 (1992) and Splatterhouse 3: Fairlight (1993) appeared on the Megadrive, so it's over 10 years since Rick, the hockey mask-wearing hero, last splashed gore all over our screens. Here's hoping he'll be back very soon.







Splatterhouse for the PS2? Hopefully it will be as good 'n' gory as the arcade original

More Treasures Uncovered

Midway opens new treasure trove

As we revealed in issue three, Midway is to release a follow-up to its successful Arcade Treasures collection. But whereas we could only previously speculate on the games that would be included, we can now reveal the full listing. The 21 games include: APB, Arch Rivals, Championship Sprint, Cyberball 2072, Gauntlet 2, Hard Drivin', Mortal Kombat, Mortal Kombat II, Mortal Kombat III, NARC, Pit Fighter, Primal Rage, Rampage World Tour, Spy Hunter 2, Steel Talons, STUN Runner, Timber, Total Carnage, Wizard of Wor, Xenophobe and Xybots.

Midway Arcade Treasures 2 will be available towards the end of the year on Xbox and PlayStation 2 (the proposed GameCube version has sadly been scrapped). The suggested retail price will be just £14.99, making it something of a bargain in our book.





Just two of the gems waiting to be uncovered in Midway's second coin-op collection

Sega storms E3

Outrun 2 races onto Xbox, plus Sonic returns...



Life after Dreamcast seems to get better and better for Sega, with a number of exciting, retro-flavoured games displayed at this year's E3 show. After months of speculation, it has been confirmed that Outrun 2 is indeed heading onto the Xbox, with a number of new features to compliment the home conversion. There'll be a new single-player mission mode and full Xbox Live support, allowing gamers to race head to head over the Web. Unlockable features will be included too, and its more than likely that the original Outrun and Turbo Outrun arcade games will be included as bonuses.

Where there's Sega, there's Sonic, and the blue spikey one is to supplement his appearance in Sonic Advance 3 on the GBA with a brand-new PS2 retro collection. Like last year's GameCube compilation, Sonic Mega Collection Plus will feature all the 16-bit hits, including Sonic the Hedgehog 1, 2 and 3, Sonic and Knuckles, and Dr. Robotnik's Mean Bean Machine. Yes, it's another repackaging job on another platform, but in the light of the disappointing 3D Sonic outings of late, we're more than happy to play through the original 2D classics one more time.

While we're on the subject of Sega, we've learnt that Sony Europe has reportedly rejected the Sega Ages games. These polished-up PS2 versions of classic Sega games, including Golden Axe and Columns, have been on sale in Japan for some time, but Sony feels that these single game packs don't represent good value for money. It's rumoured that Sega will release several of the games on a single disc and hopefully this will meet with Sony's approval.



It's finally official: Outrun 2 will be racing its way onto Xbox before the year is out

Handheld Heaven

New plug-in game consoles revealed



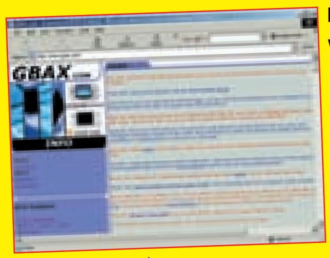
Following the recent trend of retro-styled joysticks that plug straight into your TV, Tulip (the current owner of everything Commodore, except the Amiga range), along with Ironstone Partners, has announced a ready-to-play C64-based console containing 30 built-in games. The main titles will include many of the Epyx sports simulators.

This new device, encapsulated in the popular retro-joystick design, is expected to be released during the second half of this year, and is billed as bringing new standards to products of this type, building on the success of similar devices from Atari and Namco. Its retail price is expected to be around 30 euros, which is approximately £20 at current rates. Bet you can't wait?

And as if one new retro gaming product wasn't enough, Jakks Pacific has announced another. It's basically an Atari 2600 designed around Atari's classic paddle design, featuring a number of popular games, including Breakout, Canyon Bomber, Casino, Circus Atari, Demons of Diamonds, Steeplechase, Street Racer and the classic Night Driver. This product will initially be aimed at the American market and will set you back around US$20. Head over to Jakks' website at **www.jakkstvgames.com/ataripaddle.html** to find out more.

Win a Game Park 32

We've got one to give away



Fans of retro gaming shouldn't be without one of these mini-marvels. Dozens of classic computer and console emulators are available for the GP32 handheld, enabling you to play retro games on the move. It also plays MP3 audio and Divx video.

Those fine folks over at **www.gbax.com** have provided us with a GP32 (complete with fitted backlight) to give away. It's worth over £100, so if you'd like one in your collection, you just need to know the answer to this slightly techie question:

How fast is the GP32's processor? Is it:

A: 33MHz
B: 66MHz
C: 133MHz



You can either enter online (**www.retrogamer.net**) or by post.
Send postal entries to GP32 Competition, Retro Gamer, Live Publishing, Europa House, Adlington Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK10 4NP, UK.
All the usual competition rules apply, with one winner being drawn at random. The closing date for all entries is 31st August 2004.

New For Old

It's not often that you hear of new games released for old systems – it's normally the other way around – but it does happen from time to time. We round up some of the latest developments...

Coming to Atari consoles

Apline Games from Duranik Games will soon be available for Atari's Lynx handheld. It currently features some very impressive technical aspects, including nine individual games, saveable high scores, high-colour graphics, digitised audio effects, four channels of digitised music and much more. Also, for fans of the Jaguar, Starcat Developments presents a three-part production, including two small games and a relaxing slideshow. Both of these will feature at this year's JagFest UK, which will be held in Rochester, Kent, on June 12th-13th. Get your tickets quick from **www.uk.jagfest.org.uk**.

Get in the zone



Richard Bayliss, who runs the Internet-based software label The New Dimension, has recently released Grid Zone for the Commodore 64. The game is an overhead reaction-style affair in which you must guide Ned the Dog through the arena known as the Evil Traxxonian's Grid Zone, collecting diamonds and avoiding laser beams and other perils. This new game is ready for you to download and play at **www.redesign.sk/tnd64**.

Gaming for girls



Retro gaming doesn't just belong to the realm of 20- and 30-something males who love to look back on a golden age of home computing. It's officially for girls too. Take a look at the latest release for the MSX, which is a port of a much earlier Sega game called Girl's Garden. Download it from **www.700km.com.br/mundobizarro/girls.php?lg=us** and see what we mean.

New from Cronosoft

News from the Cronosoft camp. Not only has Cronosoft joined forces with distributor Retroid Prime, but its puzzle game Reaxion is also in the final stages of development. This game will be released for both the Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit machines. For more information go to **www.cronosoft.co.uk**. Cronosoft will also be in attendance at this year's Classic Gaming Expo UK.

The ZX81 lives!

For fans of the ZX81 and other compatible machines, Andre Baune has released his latest title, which is a birds eye-view puzzle game named ZXOKOBAN. The aim is to guide Yoo around a warehouse, shifting stock into the designated space in the shortest amount of steps possible. You can download the tape image now from **www.zx-team/andre**.

Sonic ZX?



Sonic the Hedgehog is considered a classic of Sega's 8- and 16-bit consoles. But have you ever wanted to play the game on another system? Even better, everyone's favourite rubber-keyed machine? Well, you could soon, providing Sega allows it. Anestis Koutsoudis is currently working on a shareware version of the game for the Spectrum with other ZX enthusiasts, and after seeing the screenshots, we would dearly like to see if finished. Anestis has emailed us to say that there is still a problem with copyright issues, but he's willing to provide us with the work he has done so far. We reckon that Sega simply won't take the project seriously though, so it needs your support. Find out more at **www.worldofspectrum.org/anestis/soniczx.htm**.

Retro Auction Watch

In the first of a regular series of columns, retro collector Richard Burton rounds up the month's most intriguing online auctions



Collecting retro games is one thing. Spending a small fortune on a single title is another. Yet it's always good to find out which titles are pulling in the money. Maybe you'll read about a game you've got tucked away in the attic. Who knows – you may be able to fund this year's summer holiday with it. Recently I've spotted two prime examples of collectors stumping up big cash for tape games – one outrageously expensive VIC-20 title and an impressive sum spent on a small bundle of Spectrum games.

First up is Sierra's extremely rare VIC-20 title Ultima: Escape From Mt. Drash. How much do you think this scarce release by the purveyors of fine adventuring amassed on eBay? Well, loose change from down the side of the sofa isn't going to cover this one I'm afraid. To bag this beauty you would've needed a whopping $3,605 US dollars! This was, however, a US-only release and therefore the chances of finding one in your old VIC games box or local car boot sale is unlikely. Shame!

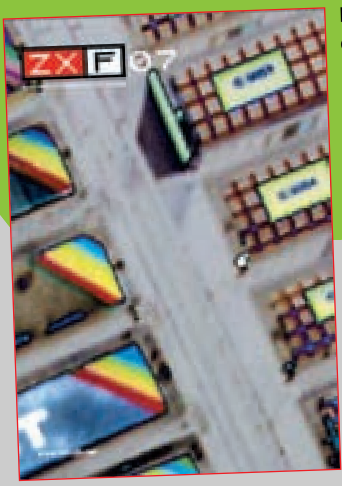
The same cannot be said of Specvaders by Hewson Consultants for the Spectrum. Albeit an early game from 1983, there must still be a good few of them stored away, waiting to be rediscovered alongside the usual gaming fodder.

When this game appeared as part of a bundle of assorted Spectrum games you'd expect a few quid to change hands and no more to be said. However, Specvaders is a super-rare title that was not only made by a company that a lot of people collect specifically for, but the game has also been on the wanted list of the winning bidder for three years and has not appeared once on eBay in that time.

Step forward Mr Steve Brown, maintainer of the TZX vault archive, an associate site of World Of Spectrum. For this one title alone, discounting the unexceptional software makeweights included in the auction, Specvaders raised an incredible £183. Steve Brown, we applaud you – and your wallet.

From PDF to ZXF

ZXF issue seven is now available for download

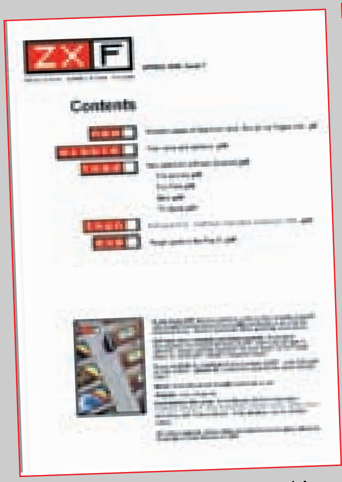


Issue seven of ZXF, an e-zine dedicated to all things Spectrum related, is now available for download from www.zxf.cjb.net. Colin Woodcock, the man behind the magazine, is doing all Spectrum fans a huge service by providing his publication through his website at no cost. All issues are freely available as Adobe PDF files, with issue seven containing no less than 19 pages of news, four reviews of recently released games and a rough guide to the Plus D interface. We took five minutes to speak to Colin and here's what he had to say.

RG: When did you first get involved in computing?

CW: My first love is, was and always will be writing, so I guess it's appropriate that the first chance I ever got to play with a computer – a ZX81 owned by a neighbour and re-housed in a home-made wooden box – I tried to write a story on it (not a very successful venture in ZX81 BASIC). That would have been 1981. We got our very own ZX81 the following year, and a year after that a 48K ZX Spectrum graced the desk in my bedroom where previously homework and the like had resided.

I didn't actually play a particularly wide range of games at the time, due to a low budget – I was very much a Mastertronic kid – but I was absolutely entranced by Crash magazine. In the late 80s I wrote an adventure game with my mate Trev that we never got around to selling, and after that it was pretty much adios to the Spectrum as I moved on to Apple Macs at university and then PCs. I never pursued computing as a subject beyond my A-levels and I currently work as a Psychologist. But my computer literacy has helped me immensely in my career – all due to the Spectrum – and so as soon as I got a home Internet connection in 1998, I started finding out about the modern Spectrum scene.



RG: How and when did you come up with the idea of ZXF?

CW: I came across a German Spectrum magazine – Suc-Session – early in 2002 that had just published its first English edition as an online PDF. At the time I was researching hardware information for a Spectrum-in-a-PC-case project that has long since fallen by the wayside. The magazine was (and still is) an A5 publication that you could print off as a booklet. I didn't actually think much about this idea until I had actually printed the magazine off and folded it, and suddenly the nostalgia wave hit me and it was like I was right back in the 80s with a copy of Crash to browse! A lot of ideas fell into place at that moment and within a few days I had fired up the old desktop publisher I had used a few years previously to produce worksheets as a teacher – ZXF issue 1 was in production! Suc-Session is an excellent magazine for serious Spectrum hobbyists, but what I wanted to create was something that captured at least something of the tone of the old Spectrum mags whilst the focus remained on 'current events' within the community.

RG: How many times a year is ZXF published?

CW: At present, three times a year. Issues are published in April, August and December.

RG: Can the readers of Retro Gamer help you in any way?

CW: Yes, they can, by submitting news information, letters or articles for publication. In recent issues, quite a few of the articles have been written by readers – Kevin Bennet and Matthew Harrodine in particular deserve a mention for their regular support – which is exactly the way I want it to be: a community magazine written by the community.

RG: Did you ever consider how successful ZXF might be?

CW: I've recently started collecting statistics from the World of Spectrum website (which hosts the ZXF files for me – it's linked from my site) and it staggered me to learn that within 10 days of issue seven's publication in April, over 400 people had downloaded a full copy of the new magazine. I don't think I ever imagined that kind of circulation and it suggests that the magazine's readership is beginning to extend possibly beyond the 'core' Spectrum community – and that's just fantastic if it is the case.

RG: Would you have imagined such keen interest in the Spectrum more than 20 years after its birth?

CW: In the 80s I just wanted bigger and better. In all honesty, once the Spectrum's commercial life was at an end, my interest in it was only to play the odd game here and there to relive old memories. If I'd been older and wiser back then I suppose it might have occurred to me that things tend to come back into fashion about 20 years after their creation, but at the time I just assumed that the Spectrum was a closed chapter.

It has an aesthetic appeal to me now that it simply didn't have back then, both in terms of the actual appearance of the machine itself and its computed output. Some of the software being produced for the Spectrum today knocks seven bells out of the stuff that was produced back then. I think this is because developers today embrace and enjoy the machine's limitations rather than trying to mask or turn a blind eye to them. It is simply great fun to see what people within the community have come up with – each new innovation seems to inspire yet more others and the ingenuity on display is fantastic!

RG: Is there anything you would like to say to our readers?

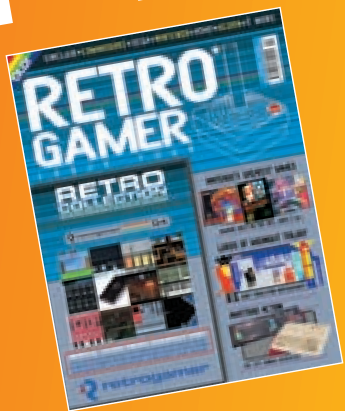
CW: Check out ZXF – if you once owned a Spectrum you'll almost certainly find something in there to interest you. Emulation-wise, the Spectrum community is the best organised group on the web – we even have the support of Amstrad (the current Sinclair copyright holder). If the magazine brings more ex-Spectrum users back to the fold I'll feel proud to have done my bit to support the continuing longevity of this classic British machine.



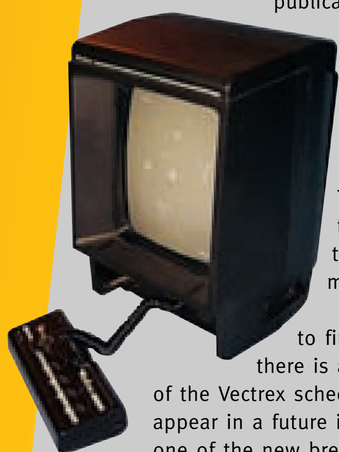
eMag

The RETRO FORUM

your letters make us warm...>



Vectrex coverage



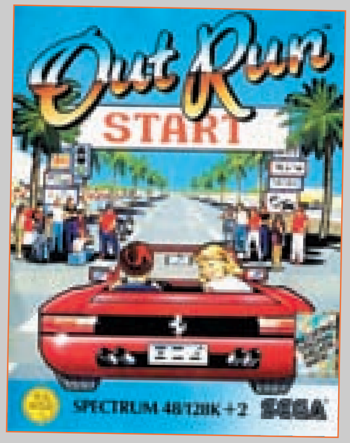
Hello! I am very impressed with Retro Gamer magazine. There simply aren't enough publications that are dedicated to the classic games and systems. Thank you for creating this magazine! I'm writing to find out if there is any coverage of the Vectrex scheduled to appear in a future issue. I am one of the new breed of Vectrex programmers, having released my first game for the system last year (War of the Robots). I have another, much larger, Vectrex game that will be released later this year (by September). If you'd like, I can send you info about the game when the release date draws closer. Also, please feel free to write to me about the system, should you have any technical or timeline questions regarding its history.
George Pelonis, via email

MC: Not only is the Vectrex very collectable, it's also a unique console, so there'll definitely be coverage in a future issue. As you're involved with the system, perhaps you'd like to contribute such a Vectrex feature yourself...

Trials and tribulations

Thank you Martyn for an excellent magazine. The gaming industry has progressed enormously since I had my first computer way back in 1982 – an Oric-1 because the Spectrum was sold out! However, I'm glad there are some things that won't come back to haunt us. For a bit of fun I've compiled a list of these:

1) Your dad getting you a book of 100 programs to type in to save money on buying games. The problem is that they didn't all work and all you got was a load of syntax errors. And when they did work, they had the playability of single-player Pong clone circa 1972.



2) The interrogations from WHSmiths' clueless sales assistants as you tried to explain why Outrun wouldn't work on your faithful Speccy, when it actually did work but it was so terribly slow you wanted to exchange it for something else (I can see the queues now).

3) Lending your latest tape game to a mate at school, which didn't work on return because the

moron had left it next to his hi-fi speakers or on top of his TV.

4) The annoyance of all the keys working on your Spectrum 48K apart from the J key (for obvious reasons).

5) Your mother accusing you of being addicted to the arcades whilst on holiday. Of course I was – you only gave me a pound to spend on them all week!

6) Sending obscene or silly messages via the Econet system to your mates in school, making them wonder if the computer had a mind of its own.

I wonder if any readers encountered any of these trials and tribulations. Maybe they have a few of their own.

Martin Dodd, via email

MC: I think we can all relate to some of your memories Martin. Lending tapes to mates was always a big mistake – I was lucky if I got them back at all, broken or otherwise. The one about arcades on holiday certainly rings a few bells – seaside trips revolved around the latest arcade games like Outrun, Afterburner and Thunderblade.

Keep it clean

Dear editor, I just brought a copy of Retro Gamer issue three and on page 54, in the article about software piracy, I was very amused to find the phrase: "And how, exactly, had the pirates managed to piss on Ocean's parade?" The language does not bother me at all but I thought I should point it out in case some young kids buy the magazine and ask their parents what the phrase means.

Wayne Bishop, via email

MC: I do keep tabs on the language in the magazine, but I feel mild swear words like this are acceptable. Besides, I think there's more chance of me nailing my balls to the wall than there is of pre-teens buying Retro Gamer.

Dear Mr Mangram...

Hi Martyn. Love the magazine – just bought issue two online, to save bidding for it later on eBay. Retro Gamer is already gaining cult status – those of us lucky enough to have first issues will be keeping them guarded like family heirlooms!


LETTERS

Here's a thought: how about printing letters pages from old magazines like Crash or Zapp, back in the days when games like Head Over Heels or Saboteur had just come out? It's great reading current opinions on retro games, but it would be interesting to see how people felt back then about the games while they were still new. You could do a different magazine each issue so long as the publishers agreed!

One article I would really like to see in the future, or as a regular part of the magazine, would be a 'how to' feature for building a MAME-run arcade machine from scratch. Some Internet sites offer this but charge too much for the instructions. I'm sure a lot of readers out there have built incredible cabs and would be happy to take to the stage.

Look forward to the next issue.

Tony Stanley, via email

MC: I'm in need of some more convincing about the old letters page idea. In my experience, people generally wrote in to magazines like Crash and Your Sinclair to voice their displeasure because some reviewer had given a game 5% less than it obviously deserved. Either that or they'd send in a joke or funny poem. As for a MAME arcade cabinet – well, something could soon be happening on that front.

Help!

Please can you help me? My grandson has found an old electronic game made by Milton and Bradley, serial no. 1072657 4043 Milton. The problem is that we cannot find the adaptor for it and were hoping you would be able to help. It was out in the late 70s/early 80s, so it's a bit of a tall order. Thanks for your help in this matter.

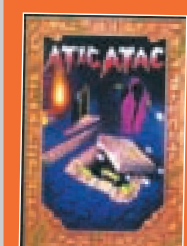
Mrs B Wellings, via email

MC: I'm afraid I can't help, but perhaps one of our readers can. If anyone has any information, email me and I'll forward it on.

Emulation hassles

Hi. I'm trying to find an emulator to run a GameCube game on my PC. The reason is that I play Virtua Striker 3 2002 on my twice weekly visits to our local pub (and have done so with previous versions for some years) and love it to bits. There doesn't seem to be a PC version and I was

Retro revival



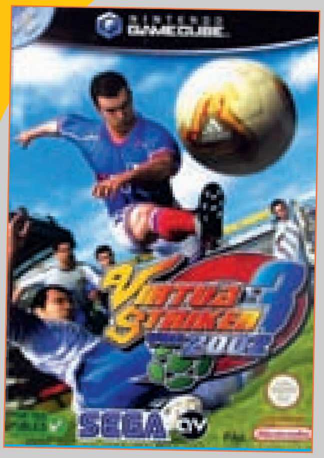
Hi Martyn and all at Retro Gamer. Congratulations on producing such a great magazine. I was a Spectrum kid back in the old days, but have recently obtained a SNES, two Megadrives and a Saturn. As I was never into consoles back in the day, I was surprised by how well many of the games have stood the test of time. Today's console games are lacking in originality and, most importantly, good old-fashioned fun. I am seriously thinking of selling a lot of my newer games to fund some retro purchases. One of my favourite games of all time was Atic Atac on the Spectrum, and having played it recently I was pleased to find it has lost none of its appeal and charm. A true classic.

I look forward to seeing more interviews with programmers and features on old software houses. How about an interview with Kevin Toms, of Football Manager and dodgy beard fame.

I've just read issue three's letters and I agree with the comment about articles about readers' retro collections. It's also interesting to see gaming shops, such as GameStation, stock retro games and machines. I guess that just goes to show how popular retro gaming currently is.

Adam Gadsby, via email

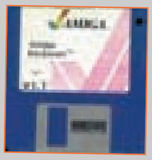
MC: I approached Kevin Toms for an interview to accompany this month's football gaming feature but heard nothing back. Maybe the beard jokes have finally got to him. Perhaps he'll change his mind when he unveils his new online football management game.



resigned to just shelling out my fiver a night for my fix. However, we went shopping last weekend and I noticed a copy of the GameCube version in one of the videogame shops. The guys there suggested that it was easy enough to get an emulator from the Net that would make the game work on my PC, so I bought it. They also recommended your magazine as a source of info and adverts for sites that would have the code. Basically, have I been conned or is it possible to get this game working on my PC?
Ed Powney, via email

MC: It sounds like you've been conned to me Ed. There are a number of GameCube emulators in development at the moment, but to the best of my knowledge, none are running commercial games like Virtua Striker 3. In addition, if there was a working emulator you'd need a super-fast PC to run the game at full speed. My advice is to buy a GameCube – a great little console that can be picked up at a very reasonable price. And just think how much money it'd save you down the pub.

Amiga ROM woes



Great magazine – brings back fine memories of my early computing years: Acorn Electron, Spectrum 128, Amiga 500, and now this beige piece of monotony.

Can you help? I reckon you've probably been asked this thousands of times, but where the hell do I get an Amiga Kickstart ROM from, so that WinUAE will work as per Issue three? I still have my Amiga 500, but it doesn't work. I've still got the original Workbench disk, but I'm not sure if it will work, or even if it does, will it work on my PC?

I took your advice and looked on the Net, but it seems that the item in question is covered by copyright. This annoys me, as I must have put several hundred pounds Commodore's way in the past.

Please help! I want to be able to play Chuck Rock again! Keep up the good work.
Ian Bestwick, via email

MC: OK, first off, your original Amiga Workbench disk will not work in your PC. The disks are the same, but the Amiga and PC floppy disk drive controllers are different. Hardware is available that allows you to create WinUAE-compatible images of the disks, but it's a complicated process. People have done it though, and you'll find the images freely available on the Web. If you do own an Amiga with a Workbench disk, then you already own the Kickstart ROM, just in a different format. Surely by downloading the file you are merely providing yourself with a backup? I'm not saying whether it's right or wrong – that's just the way I see it personally. Hope this helps.

Raise your SORD

Dear Martyn. Congratulations on your magazine, unfortunately I've only discovered it at issue three! It's got a great style, it's informative, and I've already had great fun playing the games on the coverdisc.

The reason I write is this. Does anyone else remember the SORD (I think it was also called an M5)? It was a cartridge-based system but it also had a cassette deck, and all the games came on green tapes. I remember playing games such as Jogging Jonny, Tank Battalion, and many others.

Does anyone have one? I have scoured eBay etc but haven't come across it. Was it all a lovely



dream? Also, it would be good to see some Ocean games on the cover disc.

Keep up the Good work.
Jon Squirrell, via email

MC: Well you certainly didn't dream it up, Jon. There's information on how to emulate the SORD-M5 in this month's emulation feature. As for an Ocean coverdisc, this would be fairly impossible because the publisher produced so many licensed products (from films, TV shows, arcade games etc). You usually find that in time, once the licence has expired, the intellectual property rights return to the original owner, so we would be unable to covermount a huge chunk of the Ocean catalogue. And what sort of collection would it be without games like Robocop and Batman?

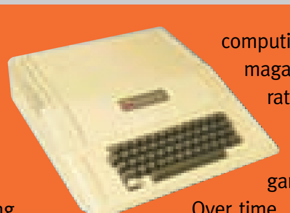
Letter from America

First I'd like to say congratulations on a job well done. Retro Gamer magazine is great. I'm so glad to see someone has done this. Of

Retro computing

Hi, Martyn. After completely missing the launch of issue one, I got myself issues two and three (just this morning) of your magazine.

You asked for feedback, so here it comes. I'm absolutely thrilled to bits about the magazine, and the fact you have announced an increase in frequency of publication twice in as many issues can only bode well for the future. I hope that this gives you the opportunity to slightly expand the remit of the editorial policy, to make it a retro



computing magazine rather than strictly retro gaming.

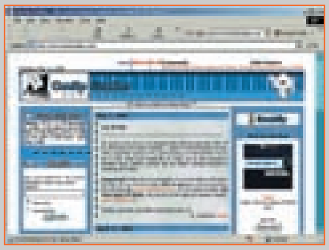
Over time, I'd love to see articles on non-gaming computer subjects. The ones that come to mind are: the Apple family (II and Mac at least, I and III if you can); the CP/M families of the early 80s; vintage Unix workstations; the variety of 'microprocessor learning systems' of the late 70s, like the MPF-1 for example; all the peripherals, like networking, modems, control boards etc. I know that the articles on the Acorn/BBC and Commodores made mention of some of these – I could just do with more.

I do understand that the main focus of the mag is gaming and that there is a healthy fan base out there for this. I just can't help but feel that you have a great opportunity for expanding into retro-computing as a whole – if it means churning out a 200-page mag every month, I won't complain!

Another angle to consider for the future might be a 'how the retro platforms are kept alive' article, detailing what the fan-base, or even sometimes some commercial companies, are working on for vintage platforms. The Contiki 8-bit OS, the new releases of AmigaOS etc.

In the meantime, my sincere thanks for bringing us what is by far the best computer magazine I've read in years, and the only one that I am actually reading cover to cover. Best of luck for the future.
Olivier Vigneresse, via email

MC: Yes, the focus of the magazine is gaming, but there will always be computing/hardware features in each issue. And as I mentioned in my editorial intro, Shaun will be contributing a number of more technical articles from now on. Thanks for the feature ideas – some of those do indeed sound interesting. I just wonder what other readers think...



course, it would only happen in the UK. Alas, Retro Gamer is one more thing I will have to import, along with my MJ Cole CDs, music magazines, and other stuff that the Limey Brits do better than us Americans.

Anyway, I have a topic that may be of interest. I own a company called OneUp Studios. This company is a record label designed to further 'The Respect and Recognition of Video Game Music in America' (I guess I wasn't thinking globally at the time I made the creed). What we do is take old videogame music, arrange and otherwise remix it, and then licence it for our own compilation albums.

We produced an album entitled SQUAREDANCE, cleverly named due to the use of Squaresoft music (Final Fantasy, Secret of Mana, Parasite Eve, etc) in a Dance music style (Trance, Two-Step, House, etc). Then came Time & Space: A Tribute to Yasunori Mitsuda, which contains music from Chrono Trigger, Chrono Cross, and Xenogears. And just this month, OneUp Studios released The Very Best of Sega, featuring music from Streets of Rage 2, Nights, Sonic & Knuckles, Sonic CD, and Sonic R, composed by England's very own Richard Jacques (who loves our arrangement of his track, by the way).

Right now we're working on a Nintendo album. As the time of writing this email, I'm working on a track from Donkey Kong Country for the SNES, and have several other Nintendo music tracks in the works, including Super Mario, Zelda, Metroid, Kirby, Donkey Kong, Star Fox and more.

We also have a videogame music tribute band called the OneUp Mushrooms. Seven living, breathing musicians playing songs of old game tunes, such as Sim City, Chrono Trigger, Legend of Zelda, Mega Man 2, and much more.

You can find out more on our website (**www.OneUpStudios.com**) if you're interested. There are demos of our two most recent albums plus 19 free remixes by myself – just click the Mustin link down at the bottom.

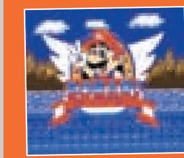
I hope you like what you see. I like what I'm seeing in Retro Gamer. I hope you find great success in this venture. I'm so happy to see a magazine devoted to old games. My friends and I aren't necessarily stuck in our ways – we do love Grand Theft Auto 3 and the like. But when it comes down to it, we're still playing Contra 3: The Alien Wars on the SNES and trying to beat it on the hard setting. One day this summer, I'm sure we can.

Thanks for your time and for the great magazine.

Mustin, via email

MC: Thanks for your encouraging comments Mustin, and I'd like to return the compliment by saying that your videogame remixes sound great. I'm sure you'll appreciate this month's coverdisc, although I suspect you're already familiar with Chris Abbot's endeavours. As for Contra 3 on hard – surely that's impossible!

Some suggestions



First of all, congratulations on such a great magazine. With the current obsession with all things retro it was obviously the right time to launch. The magazine seems almost like a fanzine (not a bad thing at all) in the way that the readers' opinions actually have an impact. I do have some suggestions for features though.

1) ROM Hacking/Pirate Games! Classic games such as Super Mario Bros 3 have had their life extended greatly by some brilliant hacks, like Mario Adventure, and of course some original NES pirates, such as the odd Sonic/Mario hybrid Somari.

2) The Game Park 32. Although it has been mentioned in every issue so far, a feature on this wonderful handheld would be superb. Thanks to this little beauty I can play Chrono Trigger, Sonic 2, River City Ransom and the Great Giana Sister's remake (Giana's Return) on the go. Every retro fan needs one!

3) Extreme Rarities. A feature on some of the rarest games ever would be incredibly useful, especially if it focused on PAL editions. Stuff like prototypes, test cartridges, competition cartridges (I found the PAL 'Starwing Weekend Cart' for £3.99 at my local GameStation, rather amazingly) and even legends such as the Super



Mario 3D cart for the SNES would be worthy inclusions.

Mark Rowley, via email

MC: I like the idea of a hacked games feature. I remember enjoying a hack of Zelda 2 on the NES in which you played as Ash from the Evil Dead films! There's defiantly some mileage there. As for a feature on extreme rarities, I'll have a word with Richard Burton, our resident retro collector.

Man down under

How are ya in England? Your format



is near perfect now, as I went through the magazine with the intention of picking out the good and the bad points of the mag, but ended up with only good points. In order to save time, I have compiled a list of the points I love and some suggestions/requests.

I love the covers background, with the Atari and Master System patterns (can't wait to see what's next). Oh, and ignore that guy that whinged about the pics on the front page – they're important for knowing what's in the mag (and the Space Invaders/Asteroids pics are wicked). The contents page is well designed. It is easy to read and pleasing to the eye. The designer should be proud. Anyone whining about the blocky lettering should go back to their holes and shut up, 'cause it looks cool. And that's what's important.

The huge letters section is excellent. It gives us a chance to read everyone's views and suggestions. The top 10 heroes section was awesome. I hope you plan to do a villains version. Also, the format for the top 10 heroes was perfect – you should use it as much as possible (the picture, the box art, and the screenshot of each hero).

The company/series history is a great read. I would love it if you could do one on the rise and fall of Sega, until it stopped production on Dreamcast. (Also, as a favour, could you please list the lesser-known consoles such as the John Sands Sega, as I would like to know it's story).

The articles on Miner Willy and Dizzy were incredibly well written. I personally have never played either of the two, but was hooked on reading about them. Afterwards, I was inspired to track them down and am pleased to say that you were right. They are classics. The ad gallery is fantastic, especially the old Atari cartoons. They are fun to read and funnily enough, I remember some of them.

Here are some suggestions that I think would ensure you were the absolute ultimate retro mag. Your coverdisc is great, but it would be even better if you could put some ROM files for your emulators on there. Even files that aren't actually retro classics, but ROMs and programs made by fans later on.

How about some articles on little-known facts (the Atari E.T. dumping thing), unreleased games and little titbits? Last but not least, could you please interview more great programmers, like Yu Suzuki, Jeff Minter, and Al Low (and the others I can't think of off-hand or even spell, like Shigeru Minimoto or whatever it is).

Thanks for the awesome mag.

The Almighty Quimby, Brisbane, Australia

PS If you do an article on Sega, please have a go at OZI-soft for all of us down here. They ruined our Sega experience by being a bunch of tools.

MC: Thanks for your awesome letter – I think I'll let it speak for itself! You can look forward to a Sega feature in issue five, along with more company histories and programmer interviews.



>Nintendo's Greatest Games

Since its early forays into console production in the 1970s, Nintendo has become synonymous with videogames. In this exhaustive feature, Jonti Davies charts Nintendo's 8-bit through to 64-bit era, offering an uplifting guide to over 50 classic Nintendo games, plus information on the hardware itself. And for all you retro collectors, each game is awarded a rarity value between 1 and 10, with 1 being very common and 10 being extremely scarce



NES/Famicon

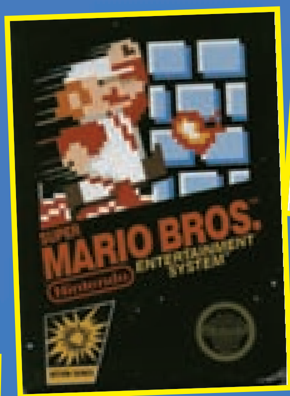
The first truly ubiquitous format, Nintendo's Entertainment System took videogames out of Atari's murky waters and into the mainstream Western consciousness as a wholly positive force. Of course, in Japan there were no murky water, and so when Nintendo rolled out its Famicom it had a clear run. Suffice to say that, with the aid of spellbinding first-party output and invaluable third-party support from the likes of Enix, Square, Konami and Capcom, the Famicom was an instant hit in Nintendo's homeland.

Nintendo's 8-bit Famicom and NES machines are identical internally. However, from an external view the Famicom is clearly a prettier machine. The NES, with its robust lunchbox looks, hasn't aged quite as well as the white-and-red Famicom unit, which resembles a primitive SNES/Super Famicom. The NES, by comparison, has more in common with the GameCube. For the record, Famicom cartridges are a fair bit smaller than NES carts. Generally speaking, unless you want to indulge in some role-playing (Dragon Warrior, Final Fantasy, etc), go for an imported Famicom (the AV model, which appeared in the early 1990s, features – surprise! – AV composite output). Expect to pay around £50 for a pristine example with two controllers. Game prices tend to peak at the £30 mark, with £5 to £10 being average. All in all, it's a cracking 8-bit system to own.

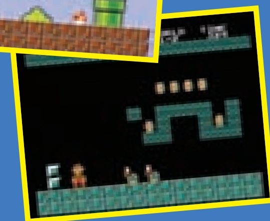
Super Mario Bros. (1983)

This is where it all begins. For Super Mario, it is the title that made him an international superstar. For gamers the world over, Super Mario Bros. stands as the monumental introduction of side-scrolling platformers. The fact that it can be completed in under 30 minutes is beside the point: this was, and remains, videogame perfection, both stylistically speaking and where gameplay is concerned. 'Essential' is the only tag that truly befits this work.

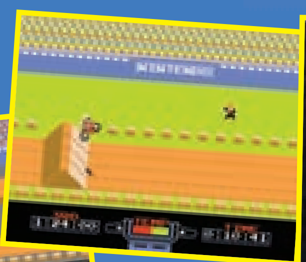
Rarity: 2













Excitebike (1984)

Excitebike is a primitive game based on the charms of twitch gameplay, which is exactly what most retroheads remember so fondly. This immediate and frantic racer (a side-on racer, at that) is a true pearl. And let's not forget those blip-blip sound effects peppered throughout Excitebike, which are yet another reason to track this down.

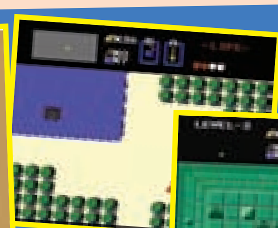
Rarity: 6

Legend of Zelda (1987)

Mario's debut was phenomenal, but Link's first outing was of an equally high calibre. The sheer scope of Link's first adventure is awesome, and it maps out the course which Link would take from that point onwards. In retrospect, perhaps the most notable thing about Legend of Zelda is its Koji Kondo-composed score: while subsequent Zelda games surpassed the original in terms of the breadth and quality of adventure on offer, the original's theme tune remains one of most memorable and inspired tunes ever to grace a videogame. Of course, Legend of Zelda is nearly perfect in every regard, but oh, that tune...

Rarity: 6





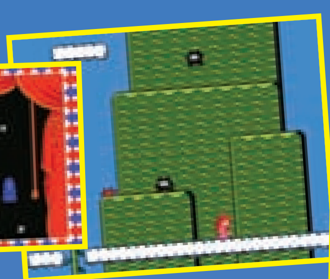


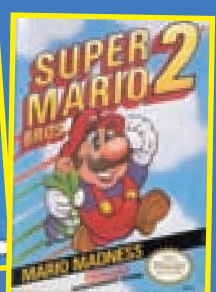
Super Mario Bros. 2 (1987)

A strange one, this. Super Mario Bros. 2 is, at its heart, a game called Doki Doki Panic, which was developed by a tiny Japanese developer. Nintendo picked up Doki Doki, dressed it in the Emperor Mario's clothes, and released it outside of Japan as the sequel to Super Mario Bros. (the Japanese version of SMB2 was basically a rehashed version of the original with different levels and it was deemed that Westerners would not welcome such as a similar product). Nintendo Japan's judgement was typically impeccable, though, and SMB2 – in its own quirky way – does the business.

Rarity: 6





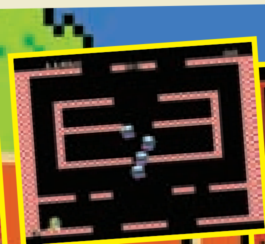


Bubble Bobble (1987)

Taito's single-screen platformer is legendary. Bub and Bob's first adventure spans 100 levels of magic bubble-blowing action. The fruit reward system is tasty (water melons and oranges mean mucho points) and the level design is perfectly poised. Then, of course, there's the theme tune – one of the best ever written for an 8-bit game.

Rarity: 8







Blades of Steel (1987)

Konami's Blades of Steel is the finest old-skool ice hockey game. The NES version of this little-known arcade classic comes admirably close to replicating the PCB's icy charms. In two-player mode, Blades of Steel is the best 8-bit sports game, full stop.

Rarity: 4





Metal Gear (1987)

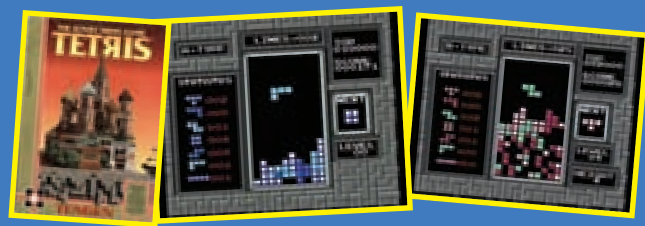
What's striking about the original Metal Gear title+ is just how difficult it is. Thanks to super-tight AI, lives disappear just when they're most needed. Snake's trickiest ever assignment is also one of his most enjoyable, however, and Metal Gear is great fun and extremely challenging. They don't make them like this anymore.

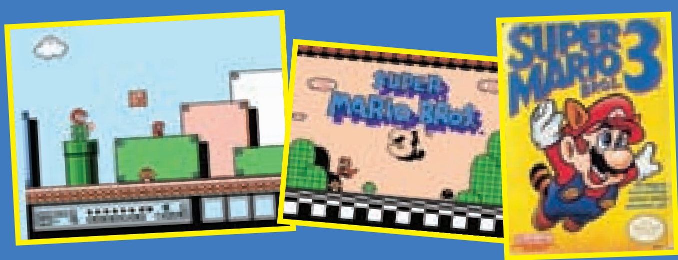
Rarity: 8

Tetris (1988)

Alexi Pajitnov's masterpiece arrived on the NES in perfect form, prior to its world-famous Game Boy adaptation. In truth, the GB version is superior, but NES Tetris still ranks as one of the finest home console takes on what is Russia's only notable contribution to computer games.

Rarity: 5





Super Mario Bros. 3 (1988)

Some consider Super Mario Bros. 3 to be the best 2D Mario game. It's certainly up there with the original, and Super Mario World, with its world maps, gives the game a uniquely sprawling feel. The frogsuit and raccoon tail are strokes of Nintendo genius that would never be repeated.

Rarity: 3

Contra (1988)

In Konami's Contra the side-scrolling platform shoot-em-up hybrid was brought together in a most remarkable fashion. Paving the way for much later delights such as the Metal Slug series, Contra was well ahead of its time. The original remains one of the standout NES releases, both from a technical standpoint (check out that palette maximisation), and from a purely playable point of view, too, with a difficulty gradient that was perfectly scaled.

Rarity: 8





RC Pro-AM (1989)

The precursor to Micro Machines is superior even to Codemasters' miniature-racing game. Rare's title is one of its best early works for Nintendo. The simple but addictive gameplay is what makes RC Pro-AM such a great little game. Power-ups add a touch of genuine Nintendo-ness to the action, in a manner not dissimilar to the later Mario Kart series. Radio-controlled car racing in videogame form was pretty much perfected here.

Rarity: 5

Essential imports

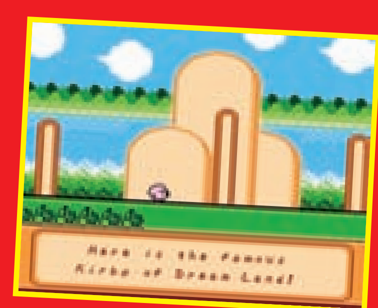
Ganbare Goemon (1986)

Goemon's first outing was a strange one, and today its place in the Goemon series is obscured by its rarity. Still, Ganbare Goemon (which literally, charmingly translates as "Go For It Goemon") is a truly inspired work, taking elements of classical Japanese folklore and reinterpreting them in the then-new setting of videogame adventure. Goemon would go on to much greater things, but even here the signs were overwhelmingly positive.

Rarity: 8

Hoshi No Kirby (1993)

This is where 8-bit life began for everyone's favourite pink pillow. HAL's classic platformer achieved that status thanks to its innovative gameplay and arresting visual style. Kirby's ability to inhale/exhale/digest/regurgitate enemies was a fantastic invention that gave our friend abilities even his Nintendo stablemates couldn't replicate. And, of course, those abilities give rise to gameplay which is at once instantly accessible and yet strangely out of sync with most other games of this type. Hoshi No Kirby, like subsequent Kirby outings, is a refreshing change of pace.



Rarity: 7

SNES/Super Famicom



Perhaps the greatest single format to own, the SNES represents the finest hour of 2D console gaming. With global domination of the home console market assured, thanks to its 8-bit debut, Nintendo had the world at its feet. It could afford to go in whichever direction Yokoi, Uemera, Miyamato, Iwata, Yamauchi et al wished to head. Their chosen route – NES to SNES, Famicom to Super Famicom – was inspired.

Buying dilemma, then: SNES or Super Famicom? Shoddy PAL conversions make the Super Famicom preferable. That and the countless triple-A import-only releases, such as the later Goemon and Bomberman games... Still, the American SNES is another good option, as it features English-language versions of such classics as Super Mario RPG, Chrono Trigger, and Earthbound. Shame it looks like a NES gone wrong, but still, if you want to enjoy such RPGs as those without having to investigate the converter method, go for an American machine. For a mint Super Famicom you shouldn't have to part with more than £70. In fact, a Super Famicom Jr, the 16-bit equivalent of Sony's dinky PSone, can be had for a similar price. The latter is perhaps the best looking of all the SNES variations.

Super Mario World (1990)

The fourth Super Mario game took Nintendo's flagship series to heights that, prior to SNES launch day, were simply unimaginable. Miyamoto's imagination was allowed to run riot, and Nintendo's design hacks brought their finest crayons to the desk. The result: a drop-dead gorgeous world of adventure and exploration, backed up with perfect gameplay and a soundtrack that rivals anything in Koji Kondo's inspired repertoire. This is where the 2D platformer peaks, at a dizzying height and in magical form. Pure 16-bit paradise.

Rarity: 3





Pilotwings (1990)

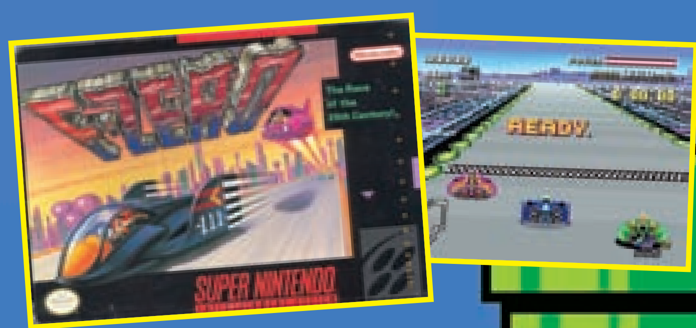
Before Pilotwings, flight sims were terribly dull affairs, dogged by over-complicated controls and stuttering frame-rates. Pilotwings, then, was a breath of the freshest air. Inhale – it still tastes fresh today! Like all of the best SNES titles, Pilotwings is full of variety (that is to say, it makes good use of SNES carts' extra memory over NES carts), and so the hang-glider is playable alongside the bi-plane and rocket belt. And there's skydiving too...

Rarity: 7

F-Zero (1991)

Mode 7 was the SNES's ace card. F-Zero looks dated now, but its faux-3D style is every bit as arresting today – only for different reasons. Specifically, the wildly fluorescent palette which gives F-Zero its unique look, is like something out of Daft Punk's alt-universe. And the sharp, sharp gameplay is more responsive than any recent futuristic racer. F-Zero is the future seen through goggles manufactured in 1991. Pretty cool stuff.

Rarity: 3





Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past (1991)

This is where role-playing (of a lone hero sort, at least) reaches its heady zenith. In one of the most challenging adventures ever put to silicon, Link makes his way through alternate versions of Hyrule – light-filled and darkness-cloaked – to do battle with Gannon. It's a quest of epic proportions and it takes place in a beautiful world. In A Link to the Past the greatest game design meets with supreme visual design to forge an inspirational experience. Above all, Hyrule, particularly in this guise, is a wondrous place to visit.

Rarity: 6

Super Mario Kart (1992)

Another all-time great. Super Mario Kart is one of most people's favourite games, which is truly remarkable when you bear in mind just how far out this game really is. It was at this point that the Mushroom Kingdom (and, by extension, Miyamoto's imagination) was adopted and warmly accepted by all parts of the world. And that's probably thanks in a very large way to the fact that anyone can pick up a SNES pad and play Super Mario Kart. There's tremendous depth here for those who dig in, and perfect immediacy for those who don't know how to. In short, it's the videogame everyone loves to love. And it's more fun than 99% of all other games. If you don't already have a copy (and you probably do), well...

Rarity: 6









Super Mario All-Stars (1993)

The videogame compendium to beat them all, Super Mario All-Stars takes all four NES Mario adventures, tarts them up and brings them together onto one Holy Cartridge. This is retrogaming heaven: 8-bit classics reinvented with 16-bit tools by the world's finest game designers. The difference in visual quality between NES and SNES versions of these legendary games is huge. Here, SMB, SMB2 and SMB3, as well as Lost Levels (which was SMB2 in Japan) look pristine and are coloured with a pastel richness that is missing from the basic originals. Don't do without this.

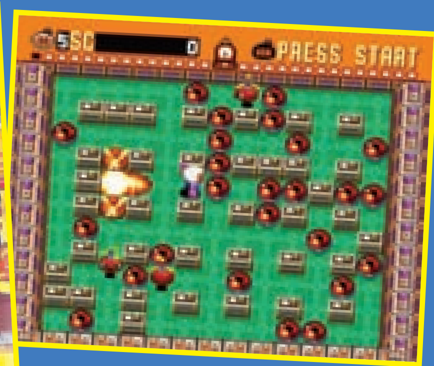
Rarity: 6

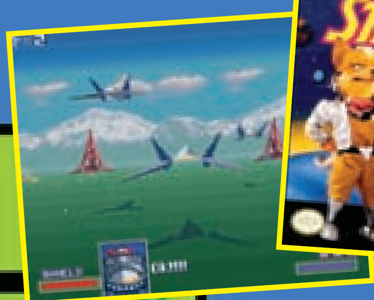
Super Bomberman (1993)

Another original idea (from the era when original ideas were abundant), which started life as a PC Engine title, Hudson's Super Bomberman is the epitome of 16-bit qualities: immediate, colourful, great fun. Super Bomberman brought with it a new peripheral which anticipated the future of videogames – the MultiTap. This device opened up a world of new possibilities. In Bomberman those possibilities were patently obvious – four-player bombing sessions are as tactical as Advance Wars and as explosive as GoldenEye. The original party game.

Rarity: 8









Starfox (1993)

As an advert for the SNES-enhancing FX Chip, Starfox (aka Starwing) was toweringly impressive. As a game, in truth, it falls short of those "real 3D" (!) standards, but that's not to say that Starfox is without merit – it's a great game despite its glaring deficiencies. For instance, although the difficulty level seems to be skewed somewhat the AI is quite advanced. Swings and roundabouts really. Still, it has an aura which is all its own, a Red Dwarf-like slant which is missing from the polished (but, admittedly, superior) sequel. We love it.

Rarity: 6

Street Fighter II Turbo (1993)

The king of 2D fighters (ignore SNK's fallacious claims), Street Fighter II Turbo packs a now-famous cast of characters into settings as varied as the world's cultures. Then it screams "Fight!" and everything gets a bit frantic. Turbo is a most apt suffix, it turns out, and thanks to that ultra-responsive streak, this is the ultimate SNES beat-em-up. In two-player mode particularly, the fun never diminishes.

Rarity: 2



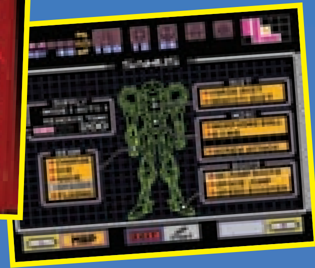


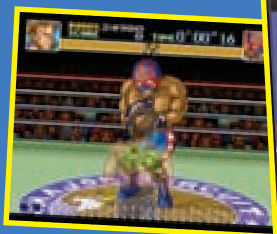
Super Metroid (1994)

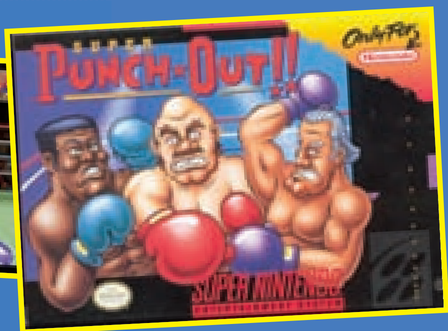
Gunpei Yokoi's pet project took Nintendo to new territory: a darker world of sci-fi cool. GameBoy creator Yokoi also (surreptitiously) managed to introduce videogames' first lead female character of note, Samus Aran. Super Metroid is not an epic (set aside 15 hours to see it all) yet it retains something of the atmosphere that is usually associated with epic games. It feels like a monumental adventure, and upon completion it lodges itself into the player's subconscious as a deeply affecting experience.

Rarity: 8









Super Punch Out!! (1994)

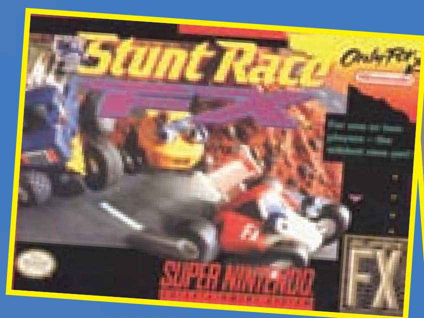
Boxing may be an ugly, ugly sport, but this is a pretty game. Thanks to its outlandish cartoon design and super-simple gameplay, Super Punch Out!! is a game of rare quality. Finding a copy may prove troublesome but to do so is well worth the effort.

Rarity: 8

Stunt Race FX (1994)

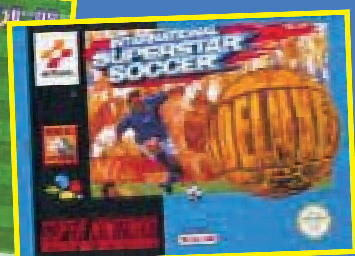
Probably the best game to make use of the FX Chip, Stunt Race FX (it was known as WildTrax in Japan) is another unique 16-bit release. Vaguely similar to a hypothetical next-gen RC Pro-AM, WildTrax takes the model car racing theme to another level, introducing 3D graphics and undulating tracks (3D gameplay). It's an intriguing mix of racing styles – stunt and race, hence the Japanese title – which sets this apart from the crowd. A hidden gem.

Rarity: 8









ISS Deluxe (1995)

The first great console football game was Konami's International Superstar Soccer. ISS Deluxe takes the original's silky playability and augments it with superior visuals, new moves and a raft of new gameplay options. Even today, in a world of Pro Evo glory, ISS Deluxe stands tall as a finely playable footie sim.

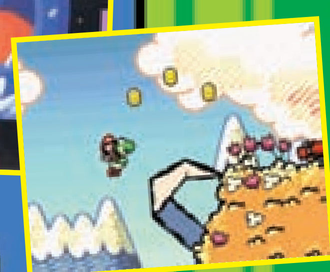
Rarity: 5

Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island (1995)

Yes, it arrived only shortly before Super Mario 64, but that's no justification for the general indifference which was displayed towards this astounding game. Here, to an even greater degree than was seen in Super Mario World, Nintendo's designers went for it. A whole book could be written on the wealth of graphical styles used in Yoshi's Island; instead, let's just say that it has to be seen. Baby Mario's debut isn't as delicately poised as Super Mario's SNES debut, yet it contains more ideas (most of which are carried off with expected aplomb) than any other Mario game. Find a copy forthwith, if you missed it first time around, or opt for the recent GBA version (titled Super Mario Advance 3).

Rarity: 8





Essential imports

Ganbare Goemon (1991)

Ganbare Goemon (aka Legend of the Mystical Ninja) on the Super Famicom was one of the first deliberately hilarious Japanese games. Goemon himself, and camp sidekick Ebisumaru, form an unlikely duo whose world is turned upside down by… well, Konami's designers. The setting is Japan, but not as we know it. The gameplay is perverted, too – it's not a platformer and it's not an RPG, yet it contains traces of both elements and comes across as an action adventure (which is the vaguest game description you'll ever find). For all its unsettling weirdness, however, Ganbare Goemon is a joy to play.
Rarity: 7

Macross: Scrambled Valkyrie (1993)

Probably the best Super Famicom shoot-em-up, and certainly the finest Macross game, Scrambled Valkyrie is a visual tour de force. It shows just how far a focused third-party developer could push the console. Awesome laser effects and explosions pepper the screen as the action hurtles relentlessly at a lightning quick pace. Find a copy on eBay for around £30 and immerse yourself in the Macross universe as it's meant to be…
Rarity: 9

Secret of Mana (1993)

One of Square's finest SNES titles, Secret of Mana is an epic of fine calibre. Unfortunately, it's also quite uncommon. To be let in on this secret you'll have to pay at least £50, but then that's not an unfair price for an experience of such depth.
Rarity: 9

Super Puyo Puyo (1993)

Compile's Super Puyo Puyo is a falling beans puzzle game of the most basic sort, and yet, it's a magical piece of software. Eschewing gimmicks in favour of a plain but addictive gameplay concept, Super Puyo Puyo is arguably the best 16-bit puzzler on any platform. And, such is its nature, it will last forever.
Rarity: 4

Mother 2 (1994)

Nintendo's madcap Mother series (that's the disarming Japanese title – the American versions went under the Earthbound tag) came to prominence on the SNES, where its dizzying mixture of aliens, baseball bats and a weird reinvention of Planet Earth gelled to form an offbeat adventure which has never been succeeded. A 64DD sequel was a long time in the works, but for now this is as far as Earthbound goes. Don't be put off by the Mana-like price tag; again, this is worth every penny.
Rarity: 10

Ganbare Goemon 4 (1995)

By the time of his fourth Super Famicom appearance, Konami's Goemon team had lost the plot. Not necessarily for the worse, though; Ganbare Goemon 4 amplifies the incredibly audacious moments found in the original (and its two inferior successors in the interim) to a mindblowing level of frenzy. Don't take more than the Recommended Daily Allowance (which, we'd say, should be set at about 30 minutes) and you'll love it.
Rarity: 8

Super Mario RPG (1996)

Square and Nintendo's collaboration here shows what can be achieved when great minds come together. Super Mario RPG has a peculiarly distinctive atmosphere, coupling Square's mastery of the grandiose with Nintendo's artistic adventurousness. Key to the game's success, though, is the simple fact that from start to finish it's great fun – there's never a dull moment.
Rarity: 8

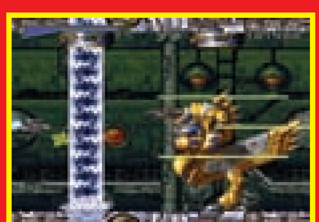
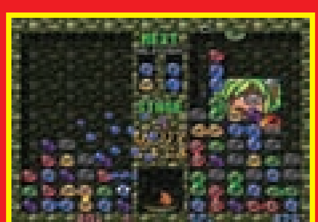
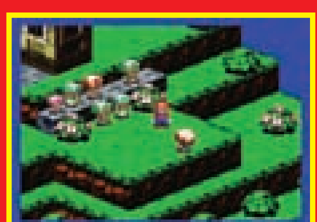
Super Bomberman 5 (1997)

A late release in the Super Famicom's life, Hudson's fifth Super Bomberman game is the most far-fetched of the lot. Sure, it's riddled with all sorts of nonsense (what have dinosaurs got to do with Bomberman?) but that doesn't detract from what is essentially more – much more – of the same. A MultiTap, need we say, is essential in order to experience the full impact of this gorgeous title.
Rarity: 8







Nintendo 64/ Ultra 64



The Nintendo 64 was one of the most controversial formats to come out of Kyoto. OK, it's not in the same controversy league as the Virtual Boy, but still... The most obvious cause of consternation among gamers and developers was Nintendo's decision to stick with cartridges when the world of home consoles had already made the paradigm shift from carts to CDs. From a commercial standpoint, it probably was the wrong decision. But who cares about commerce? From a purely creative point of view, it was the best decision Nintendo ever made. Consider the evidence: would Super Mario 64 have been the same with loading times and streaming audio?

Anyway, today the N64 continues to be an essential format for the Nintendo completist. Like its predecessors, the PAL N64 was marred by the presence of game conversions which did the system (and the game in question) no favours whatsoever – witness the super-slo-mo 'delights' of PAL WaveRace 64. So, an NTSC machine is worth the effort – and it's no longer a particularly expensive route to traverse, either.

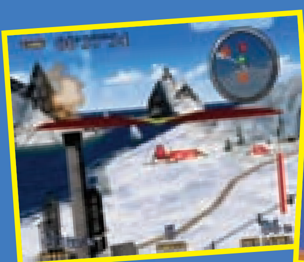
Super Mario 64 (1996)

Super Mario 64 is arguably the greatest videogame of all time. Quite how Miyamoto and team managed to put together such a groundbreaking title is difficult to fathom. The transition from Super Mario World to Super Mario 64 is enormous. It's unlikely that any videogame will ever create as great a shock as Super Mario 64 did upon its debut at 1996's Shoshinkai show in Tokyo. Even today, it stands tall as a technical marvel, and the game itself, so perfectly planned and hugely enjoyable and full of magic moments, puts even Super Mario Sunshine to shame. An undisputed work of genius, Mario 64 belongs in every videogame library.

Rarity: 3









Pilotwings 64 (1996)

Along with Super Mario 64, this completed the N64's first-party launch line-up. And a well-chosen duo it was, too. Pilotwings 64 is the perfect companion title to Miyamoto's overwhelming Mario adventure, offering tranquillity instead of action (soaring, silent hang-gliders in lieu of turtle-shell surfing and Koopa-hurling) and worldly quirkiness in place of Mario's otherworldly madness (human cannonballs are so hilariously inhumane). Marry these unique gameplay themes with visuals that seemed almost photorealistic at the time (and still impress today), and you have Pilotwings 64 – a worthy sequel to the SNES original.

Rarity: 5

WaveRace 64 (1996)

The third triple-A N64 release, WaveRace 64 was perhaps the most impressive demonstration of the potential bound up in the N64's architecture. Previously, water had usually been drawn as a simple block of blue; now it came to life, with ripples, waves, and storms depicted in awesome realism. What's more, EAD (Nintendo's Entertainment Analysis and Development department) managed to factor its random wave creation into the gameplay equation, affecting players' jetski rides with its rough seas. Track design, too, is spot-on, introducing buoys to the seemingly standardised videogame racing formula. Innovation and quality ahoy! Even the GameCube successor doesn't match WaveRace 64's timeless beauty.

Rarity: 4









Mario Kart 64 (1996)

It's not the magical game that the original SNES version was, yet Mario Kart 64 still has all the hallmarks of a Nintendo classic. Thanks to its cheating AI and lack of difficulty (a paradox, but it's true), Mario Kart 64 was criticised harshly in some camps. Ignoring its obvious faults, though, there's plenty of good to praise. The most appealing aspect of Mario Kart 64 is, of course, its four-player antics which offer multiplayer gaming of a type that is worryingly addictive. Not even the great original could sustain four players. Just don't pick it up if you haven't the necessary extra controllers.

Rarity: 2

Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon (1996)

Picking up where Ganbare Goemon 4 left off – that is, some way deep into straitjacket insanity – Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon (aka Ganbare Goemon 5) does the whole crazy Japanese thing in lush 3D, and serves it beneath a soundtrack that jangles exactly like the theme tune from Family Fortunes. Mental images of Les Dennis are no less disturbing than the very real images of Ebisumaru herein, however. Giant robot battles complete what is (along with Mischief Makers) probably the N64's craziest adventure.

Rarity: 4





Blast Corps (1997)

Blast Corps (known as Blast Dozer in Japan) remains something of an anomaly in the entire history of videogames – there has never been another game like this (Rare's first for the N64). Destruction is the overriding theme, but a thread of imminent nuclear disaster runs through the game as players attempt to avert the collision of an off-course bomb carrier vehicle. Using a variety of destructive vehicles and robots (the titular Blast Corps) it's necessary to flatten anything/everything in the carrier's path. Myriad side-missions complete what is a unique and massively enjoyable game.

Rarity: 6

GoldenEye 007 (1997)

GoldenEye still represents the pinnacle of first-person shooters. (For our money, Rare's Bond game is infinitely superior to Bungie's over-hyped Halo.) In four-player split-screen mode, along with Mario Kart 64, it proves the worth of Nintendo's decision to include four controller ports on the front of its console. Months on end were lost to its multiplayer charms, but even in single-player mode, GoldenEye provides a first-person adventure so well planned and enthralling that it has yet to be matched. Arguably Rare's finest hour, GoldenEye shows that companies other than Nintendo Japan could work magic with the N64.

Rarity: 3





Mischief Makers (1997)

Treasure's first N64 game is a true gem. Sticking to the company's 2D roots, Mischief Makers (aka Yuke! Yuke! Troublemakers) adheres to the standard 2D platforming concept. What sets it apart from most of its ilk, though, is its level design. Vast 2D worlds contain more secret areas than most 3D platformers manage in an entire game, and all the while the action is frantic and buzzing. To top it all, it looks marvelous.

Rarity: 7

Starfox 64 (1997)

Starfox 64 is the ultimate galactic videogame. From its wonderfully charismatic cast to its clichéd-yet-vital settings, Starfox 64 (renamed Lylat Wars in PAL territories, for the sake of a European company who somehow could lay claim to the 'Starfox' name) is a movie as a videogame. There are moments here which send shivers down the spine, and set-pieces which are so well choreographed as to leave a beaming grin on the player's face. This is one 64-bit update which takes the original formula light years beyond its initial venturing.

Rarity: 5





Yoshi's Story (1997)

Cited by some as a huge disappointment, and by others as blatant proof of some truth in detractors' N64-for-kids axiom, Yoshi's Story was criminally overlooked by most gamers and much of the specialist press. While it can indeed be 'finished' in an hour or two, so, by the same definition of 'finish', can most classic shoot-em-ups. To complete the game, however, patience and determination are required, but all the while, collecting fruit and saving Yoshis is one of the most therapeutic experiences you'll ever indulge in. Like Pilotwings 64, Yoshi's Story is all about the ambience. Sickly sweet for some, perhaps, but, as far as we're concerned, magnificently escapist.

Rarity: 7

Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (1998)

Where to begin? It was several years in the making, but boy, it was worth waiting for. Besides being one of the greatest videogames ever to come out of Nintendo Japan, Ocarina of Time was greeted with a state of frenzy upon its release. Somehow, Nintendo managed to release Miyamoto's magnum opus worldwide within the span of a single week. The rush to obtain a game which was quite rightly hyped to the nines was nothing short of manic. Cartridges procured, it immediately became clear why Nintendo had spent so much time on Ocarina – this was a work of love. Even its bona fide GameCube sequel, Wind Waker, isn't as compelling as this. The world of Hyrule is a very special place.

Rarity: 4





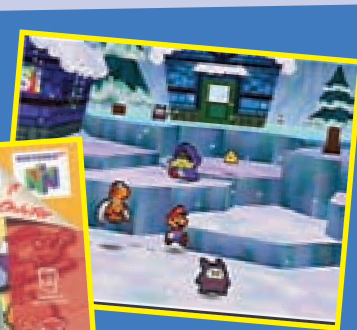




TenEighty Snowboarding (1998)

EAD's TenEighty hit the slopes just as the snowboarding subgenre was become a game style in its own right. And it blew the competition away. With intricate and precise control, TenEighty marks the high tide of technical excellence on the N64. It also supplies ample credence to the notion that EAD can create realistic games of as high a quality as its surrealist works. Sparkling stuff.

Rarity: 5

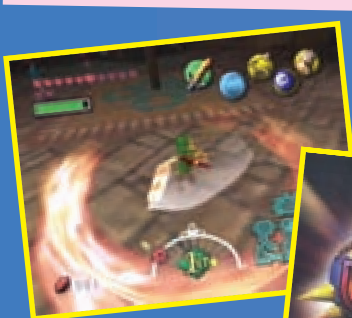


Paper Mario (2000)

If ever there was a Mario game which was overlooked – by the press *and* the punters – this was it. Intelligent Systems' Paper Mario is the unofficial sequel to Square and Nintendo's Super Mario RPG. Yet it has even greater character than that landmark SNES title. Artistically, Paper Mario is the 64-bit equivalent of Yoshi's Island on the SNES: daring and abstract to the point of genius, boldly scrawled in a lovely crayon/pop-up book style. To cap it all, it is a huge adventure which constantly fills the player's heart with that summery sensation of Nintendo magic. GameCube Paper Mario 2, thankfully, is forthcoming. In the meantime, try to find a copy of this classic for around £20.

Rarity: 8







Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask (2000)

In the entire Zelda canon, Majora's Mask is perhaps the strangest release (barring, of course, the risible CD-i games, but they don't count). Miyamoto delegated this title to one of his EAD sidekicks, who, in turn, saw fit to impose a theoretical 72-hour life cycle on the game, make the RAM Expansion kit a requirement, and include as many crazy side quests as possible. The resulting game, thanks especially to the way in which it is based on a perpetually repeating three-day cycle, is certainly a unique one. Majora's Mask has all the quality of a mainline Zelda game, only with a greater-than-usual quota of eccentricity. It really is highly recommended.

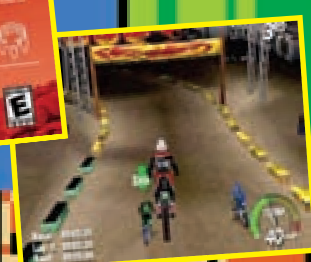
Rarity: 8

Excitebike 64 (2000)

Leftfield's 64-bit spin on the antiquated Excitebike franchise was something of a pleasant shock. Along with Majora's Mask it makes greatest use of the RAM Expansion kit which Nintendo introduced a couple of years into the N64's life. Excitebike 64 is built on a solid and realistic physics engine, and as a result it is supremely playable. Well worth looking out for.

Rarity: 7





Essential imports

Bakuretsu Muteki Bangaioh (1999)

The quality of Treasure's N64 output peaked when Bangaioh was released in Japan. Here was a ground-breaking 2D shoot-em-up with looks to die for and even more substance than its considerable style. Like Bubble Bobble and Yoshi's Story, the most rewarding aspect of Bangaioh is its fruit salad bonus system – strawberries and bananas abound, and collecting these does wonders for hi-scores. A delicious videogame.
Rarity: 10

Sin & Punishment (2000)

Originally, Sin & Punishment went under the Dostoyevskian title of Crime and Punishment. The link between game and novel is ambiguous, but one thing is for sure: both are compelling accounts of widescale destruction. In Sin & Punishment, Treasure delivers its finest-ever 3D blaster. The bizarre thing was, no-one expected such a bold deviation from the team's conventional style, and when it arrived (courtesy of Nintendo, no less, who acted as publisher on Treasure's behalf in lieu of ESP) its unique qualities were heralded loudly in the specialist press. In spite of overwhelmingly positive import reviews, Sin & Punishment was never published outside of Japan. Find a copy for under £60 and consider it a bargain.
Rarity: 10

F-Zero Xpansion Kit (2000)

This is the Holy Grail for fans of Nintendo Japan's super-quick F-Zero series. Finding a copy of this 64DD disk would be a major coup – if/when located, don't expect to part with less than £150. Is it worth it? Definitely. Used in conjunction with a Japanese copy of F-Zero X, the Xpansion Kit is a wonderfully comprehensive track and craft editing package. The possibilities are endless.
Rarity: 10



Collectable hardware

GameBoy Light



Only recently has a backlight been incorporated into the design of the otherwise perfect GameBoy Advance. Many moons ago, however, an indiglo backlit GameBoy was released in Japan. This ultimate version of the original monochrome hardware took the GameBoy Pocket's sleek design and improved it with the addition of a screen that could glow (very brightly) in the dark of night. Tetris while camping – what more could anyone demand? Battery life was decent, too – around 15 hours off two AA cells – and the system's chrome silver/gold finish gave it a look of sophistication. Why it never appeared outside of Japan is anyone's guess.

Famicom Disk System



This fine piece of kit was designed as an add-on for the original 8-bit Famicom. Its utilisation of a writable disk format (Famicom disks are not dissimilar to 3.5" floppies) made it possible for Nintendo to pioneer a new method of software distribution. In stores across Japan, kiosks were installed wherein gamers could download titles to blank Famicom disks. This was a successful business for a good few years in the late 1980s, but with the advent of the Super Famicom, Nintendo reverted to its original cartridge-based distribution model. While the FDS connected to the base of the Famicom, a Sharp-built Famicom Twin system brought the two pieces of hardware together under one hood. This latter system is rare – expect to part with £200 for a nice example.

Satellaview

Unlike the other collectable hardware outlined here, the Satellaview is almost useless. Nevertheless, it's worthy of note. As the means by which Super Famicom owners could access a network, its historical significance is huge. Rare sequels and revisions of Super Famicom classics were available for download (F-Zero BS, for example) via the Satellaview, but with access limited to Japan, Western retrogamers will find the hardware of value only for cosmetic reasons. As a platform for the Super Famicom it looks great...



64DD



The 64DD (Disk Drive) was never likely to succeed. Nintendo claimed that the 64DD would revolutionise videogames, but unfortunately that revolution never occurred. When the hardware was finally released, it was bundled with Randnet software, which offered Internet access at 28.8Kbps, and Kyojin No Doshin (Doshin the Giant). That game was shoddy, unlike its eventual GameCube rebirth, and subsequent releases did little to sell the hardware – a new version of Mario Paint, along with some other utilities, constituted the bulk of the 64DD's limited software catalogue. The F-Zero Xpansion Kit transpired as the 64DD's raison d'être – which, in spite of the scope of possibilities originally advertised, ended up as the hardware's regrettable epitaph.

sound



device

analogue & digital

>Play it again, SID

One of the key features of the Commodore 64 was its dedicated sound synthesis chip. Known as SID (Sound Interface Device), the chip delivered high-quality, three-channel sound. As Adam Dawes reveals, this small piece of silicon had quite a future ahead of it

The SID chip was designed in 1981 by Bob Yannes, the Commodore 64's systems architect. At a glance, the specifications of the chip look rather basic. The SID had three voices and so could play three different notes simultaneously. Four different types of sound were available: a sawtooth wave, a triangle wave, a pulse wave and white noise. Each voice could independently choose which type of sound to play.

In addition to this, it was possible to apply filters to the voices to change the way they sounded. Properly applied, this allowed the basic sound types listed above to produce much more varied notes, more like a music synthesizer. The chip had both analogue and digital components, and the analogue parts of the chip allowed a far greater variety of sounds to be produced that would otherwise be possible.

Compared to the sound hardware we are used to today, this may seem simplistic. But in the early 1980s this was impressive stuff, especially considering the size and budget constraints that governed the SID's design. Even so, it's unlikely that Bob Yannes had any idea of the real potential of his chip or of the uses to which it would be put over the coming years.

Tuneless wonders

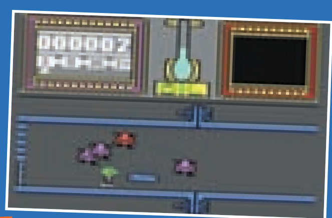


Initially the music and sound effects produced by the C64 were fairly basic. The SID was used mainly for simple sound effects, and the music was little more than simple chords and tunes that were created using the unmodified sound types previously described. Those of you with an emulator to hand might like to load up 1983's Falcon Patrol, as it provides a typical example of early SID usage.

Things continued in this vein until around 1985, when something quite unexpected happened. A new breed of SID musician emerged and unleashed innovative, high-quality, fantastic-sounding music on an unsuspecting public. One of the first and most famous composers was Rob Hubbard. Hubbard was unimpressed with the music that was being produced by the home computers at the time, as most of it was bland and out of tune. After trying unsuccessfully to sell his own software he decided to focus on writing music for other people's games.

One of Hubbard's first pieces of commercially published C64 music was written for Gremlin's Thing On A Spring. Gary Penn, a staff writer on Zzap!64, said of Thing in an August 1985 review: "This game has incredible instant appeal due to the exceptional piece of music (I've never heard anything so marvellous on the 64)." Julian Rignall continued the review with, "The sound is unbelievable, I won't describe it but just wait until you hear it; words fail." The sound for the game was awarded 98%, with the comment, "The London Symphony Orchestra might *just* sound better." And with this, the C64 music scene was born.





Great composers

Several other musicians were also working on producing high-quality music for the SID chip at around this time. Names that are now famous to thousands of fans include Martin Galway, Ben Daglish, David Whittaker and Jeroen Tel. Many of these musicians also wrote their own assembly language music players in order to generate their music.

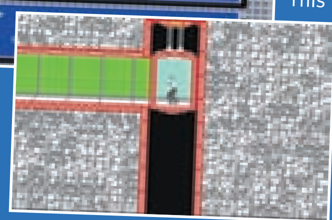
The musicians employed many tricks to improve their music, so that it sounded like it was beyond the technical limitations of the SID chip. One of these tricks was to use 'arpeggio' sounds, whereby the notes of a chord were played in very rapid succession. This resulted in the production of what sounded like a chord, but it only used one of the three available voices. Drums were created using the white noise sounds, often with volume effects applied to make them sound more realistic. Clever layering of the melody, drums and bass lines were often employed to give the impression that more than three voices were in use. This resulted in a distinctive, synthetic, electronic sound that fitted perfectly with the popular mainstream music of the 1980s. Over the following seven or eight years, C64 music enthusiasts were treated to one fantastic melody after another.

The coders and hackers of the time were aware how good the music being produced was. Hundreds of demos were released with music ripped from games so that it could accompany the obligatory scrolling message. The POKEs required to play the music (along with all of the sub-tunes that played as games progressed) regularly featured in magazines, so that people could listen to the music outside of the games themselves.

The game-buying public were also well aware of the quality of these tunes. There are anecdotal tales of games being bought quicker than they could be put on the shelves simply because it featured a new Rob Hubbard tune. The quality of the game often didn't matter – in many cases the music was commissioned and composed before the game had even been designed. The music within each game became a significant factor in the success of the title.

Sampled sounds





Even before Hubbard composed Thing On A Spring, some clever programmers where coaxing the SID chip into playing sampled sound. This certainly wasn't on the feature list when the chip was designed, but these resourceful folks took advantage of the simple fact that the SID made a clicking noise when its volume level was modified. By very rapidly changing the volume level it was possible to produce some low-quality (but perfectly reasonable) 4-bit sampled sounds.

One of the earliest and most memorable uses for this was in the game Impossible Mission, released by Epyx in 1984. When the game started, an evil voice addressed you from within your TV, saying: "Another visitor. Stay awhile... stay forever!" This and a number of other samples that featured during the game set the scene perfectly. Activision's Ghostbusters, from the same year, also employed sampled speech to very good effect.





Initially, however, the amount of work the CPU was required to perform in order to play these sounds meant that little else happened while the samples were playing. The action would freeze until the speech had finished. This problem was solved later on and sampled sound became more common, used both for sound effects (I, Ball and Mega Apocalypse both featured such samples, with the former actually playing some music at the same time as the sample) and in some of the later pieces of music.

>Sounding off

Of course, the C64 wasn't the only 8-bit computer that could produce sound. The original Spectrum could only produce a simple monotone beep, so this was never going to compete with the aural capabilities of the SID chip. The Amstrad computers (and also the later 128Kb Spectrum models) were fitted with a General Instruments AY-3-8912 sound chip, while the BBC had a Texas Instruments SN76489 chip. Both of these chips were capable of producing three channels of sound plus an additional channel of white noise.

While some excellent music and sound effects were produced for these computers, the overall sound was never as rich or as complex as that produced by the more flexible SID chip, and they never received the same level of attention.

>Top 10 C64 tunes

The following top 10 pieces of C64 game music were voted for by the readers of the **www.remix64.com** message board and the **comp.sys.cbm** newsgroup:





1. Delta (Rob Hubbard)
2. Sanxion (Rob Hubbard)
3. Parallax (Martin Galway)
4. Trap (Ben Daglish)
5. Cybernoid (Jeroen Tel/Maniacs of Noise)
6. Rambo (Martin Galway)
7. Turbo Outrun (Jeroen Tel/Maniacs of Noise)
8. Thrust (Rob Hubbard)
9. Mega Apocalypse (Rob Hubbard)
10. The Last Ninja (Ben Daglish)



Sampled sounds were particularly well suited to producing drum effects. Due to the nature of percussive sounds, the low-quality samples rarely tended to be noticeable. Using this trick to play samples also effectively created a fourth sound channel (none of the other three channels were required in order for samples to be played), giving the musicians a whole new set of things to try.

There are many excellent pieces of music that use sampled sounds for drums, speech and other effects. The first to be released was Martin Galway's music for Arkanoid, published by Imagine in 1987. Galway admits that he didn't actually have any sampled drum sounds so the drums used in this piece of music were created manually (he describes them as "a collage of farts and burps"). The technique was very much refined over the coming months and years, however. Worthy of particular mention are Savage and Turbo Outrun (both by Jeroen Tel and the Maniacs of Noise), and Combat School (another by Martin Galway), which all make excellent use of sampled sound.

>Which SIDe are you on?

One thing that gets enthusiasts talking is which revision of the SID is best. Enthusiasts are divided between those who prefer the old SID (used in the original C64s and early revisions of the 128) and those who prefer the new SID (used in the C64c, C64GS and later revisions of the 128). Of course, music and samples composed before the introduction of the C64c may well sound better on an original bread bin 64, as Commodore fixed a bug in the new SID, which made samples sound much quieter and slightly altered the audio output. In truth, both chips have their advantages. It comes down to factors such as how well the programmer or musician has used the hardware, how clear the samples are, and how good the music is.

Time marches on



Towards the latter part of the 1980s, the C64 and the other 8-bit machines found themselves competing with the much more powerful 16-bit computers and consoles. The likes of the Amiga, Atari ST, Megadrive and SNES were making it clear that the days of the 8-bit computer were numbered. Whilst they battled on valiantly throughout much of the 1990s, their popularity unquestionably began to diminish. As the viability of publishing software on the C64 decreased, the amount of new music produced for the platform naturally reduced too, with software companies switching their attention to the 16-bit systems. Many of the SID musicians also moved to these new platforms. Eventually, the C64 and the SID chip slowly faded into history.

Of course, this is far from the end of the story, as a thriving community of remixers and performers have embraced the SID tunes of the past in some surprising ways. As far back as 1986, a company called Mupados released a cassette tape called Datahits in the WHSmiths chain of shops. This tape contained the first remixes of C64 music and featured enhanced versions of the tunes from Rambo, Never Ending Story, Ghostbusters, Crazy Comets and Hyper Sports. The music was still fairly similar to the original (the C64 still provided all of the melody) but was in stereo and had realistic sampled drum tracks overlaid onto the music.



A similar cassette was given away with Zzap 64 magazine in June 1987. The tape, called The Zzap Sampler, contained a number of game demos on side one and a fully remixed version of the Sanxion loading tune on side two (entitled Thalamusic). This was rearranged by Hubbard himself using top-of-the-range keyboards and drum machines, and it was extremely popular.

Remixes of the C64 classics continue to be made. Many thousands of them can be found on the Internet, all in MP3 format and available to download for free. The original songs have been remixed in more ways than can be imagined, from hardcore techno versions to 'boy band' mixes complete with harmonious lyrics. Not all of these are just sequenced on computers, either – a number of bands have formed to play music inspired by the C64. One such band is Machinae Supremacy, whose version of Chris Huelsbeck's Great Giana Sisters is definitely worth a listen (as are the other MP3s on their website – **www.machinaesupremacy.com**). But more on live performances later...

Back to the future



One of the first people to start giving serious thought to reworking the SID classics was Chris Abbott. In 1998 he produced the first of what was to become a series of CDs entitled Back In Time. The CD, sold via his C64Audio website (**www.c64audio.com**), contained 15 completely new remixes, several of which were worked on by Hubbard (this was quite an achievement since Hubbard had all but completely disappeared from the public eye). All of the tunes on the CD were licensed, with royalties paid to the original artists.

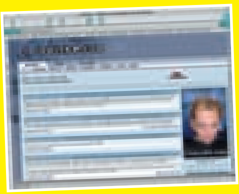
"It was a CD I wanted to see, but no one else was going to make it happen," says Chris. "They were all waiting for the composers to release CDs themselves." Did the composers support the idea? "They reacted with various combinations of suspicion (of legal and monetary matters), help and scepticism, and the occasional 'you go, girl!'" To Chris' relief, the CD was a success and has now completely sold out. This disc will no doubt be a retro collector's item itself in years to come.

>Web resources

Looking for more information? Try some of these websites:

C64 Audio

www.c64audio.com
The home of some of the greatest C64 remake CDs released over the last few years.



Remix64

www.remix64.com
An excellent resource for C64 and Amiga music remakes. The discussion board is well worth a look too.

Remix.Kwed.Org

http://remix.kwed.org
A collection of thousands of freely downloadable remixes of many classic C64 tunes in MP3 format.

Sidplay2

http://sidplay2.sourceforge.net
The website for the Sidplay program, available for Windows and Linux. Windows users may also like to take a look at Sidplay2/w at **www.gsldata.se/c64/spw**, which offers an easy-to-use GUI as well as the SID player itself. A Mac version of the original Sidplay is also available at **http://stud1.tuwien.ac.at/~e9426444/sidplay**.

High Voltage SID Collection

http://hvsc.c64.org
An ongoing project to archive as much original C64 music as possible (currently over 25,000 tunes). Music can be played using Sidplay.

StereoINSid project

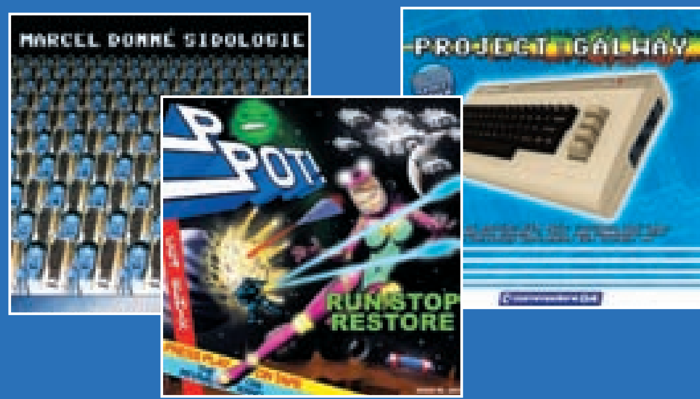
www.protovision-online.de
Protovision is working closely with hardware enthusiast 'Thunder.Bird' (**www.athomebymalte.de/e_haupt2.html**) to allow you to internally expand an original C64 to include an extra SID chip.



SID information site

www.kubarth.de/sid/index.html
A site dedicated to providing in-depth information on the SID chip. Contributions welcomed!

Since this success, many more CDs have been produced, both by Chris and other people with similar interests. Most of these are straightforward remix CDs, but some of them are more original titles, such as Sidologie (a CD by Marcel Donné containing 11 SID tunes remixed in the style of Jean Michel Jarre and Vangelis) and Project Galway (a double CD of songs recorded directly from Martin Galway's own SID chip).



A number of future productions are also in development at C64Audio. One of these is a large collection of polyphonic ringtones for suitably capable mobile phones. These should be available some time during the summer. Information about them and all of the CDs can be found on the website.

The most startling and unique thing to come from the organisation, however, has to be the Back In Time Live concerts. Not satisfied with listening to music on CDs, Chris decided to organise a string of live concerts, with the hits we know and love being performed by bands on stage, in front of our very eyes. The first of these was held in a Birmingham nightclub in May 2001 and was very popular with those that attended. Many of the celebrities of the C64 era were present – in addition to a large array of musicians there were well-known faces from the coding and publishing world. The event even included a light show by Jeff 'Yak' Minter!

"An 8-bit gig worked in Finland," says Chris, "so I figured it could work here. The original idea was cheap dance gigs for students though, not the fan-driven celebrity performance monolith it's become."

Since then there have been a total of six Back In Time Live concerts, the most recent of which was a spectacular day held at The Brighton Centre. Several hundred people attended the event, which was split into two parts. During the day there was a chance for the visitors to show their prowess on a variety of classic C64 games and mingle with the celebrities and other fans, before the concert itself started in the evening.

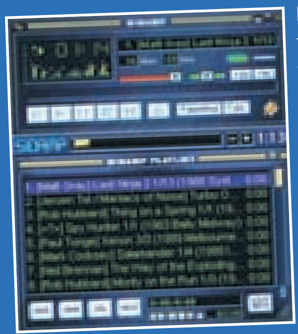
The performance started with a newly formed group, Stuck In D'8os, comprising Mark 'Madfiddler' Knight, Ben Daglish, Marcel Donné, Reyn Ouwehand and Andreas Wallstrom. This was followed by a one-off performance, Rob Hubbard Unplugged, during which the most famous of all the SID composers played many of his classic C64 tunes, plus some of his Atari 8-bit and Spectrum compositions too. There was then a lively set by Press Play On Tape, one of the most prolific C64-inspired bands. Originating in Denmark, the group's line up is Andre Tischer Poulsen and Theo Engell-Nielsen on keyboards, Uffe Friis Lichtenberg on bass, Jesper Holm Olsen and Martin Koch on guitar, and Søren Trautner Madsen on the drums. Complete with a large video screen showing the games that they were covering, these guys were very impressive to watch and even managed to fill the dance floor.

The climax of the event was a combined performance by Stuck In D'8os, Press Play On Tape and Rob Hubbard, playing a fantastic rendition of Monty On The Run. I suspect there cannot be many violinists that can play this fast and complex melody as well as Mark Knight managed to. A DVD video of the day is planned for release later in the year.

If this sounds like an event you'd like to have attended, don't worry – the next Back In Time Live concert is in the planning stages right now.

We asked Chris for the details. "Well, it's a live concert with seven acts, in three parts. Stuck in D'80s and Press Play On Tape will headline it. Sponsorship welcomed!" This year's event will take place on September 11th at St Luke's, located on London's Old Street. For more information visit **www.backintimelive.com**.

Keeping SID alive



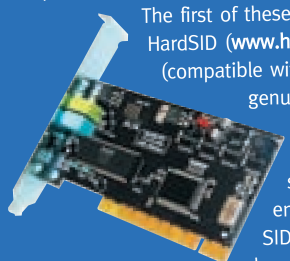
If that all sounds a bit too much though, and you just want to remind yourself how the C64 itself sounded back in its prime, then you may be interested to know about a free program called Sidplay2.

This is a very cleverly programmed utility that emulates both the C64 CPU and the SID chip. This allows the original assembly language sound routines and music data to be extracted from the memory of a C64 and played on any PC. The reproduction isn't entirely perfect, but it's very close and will bring back a lot of memories to anyone that remembers the music the first time around. A small plug-in entitled SidAmp will also allow you to play SID music through WinAmp. For convenience, all these utilities can be found on the Retro Gamer coverdisc.

There's no need to worry about how to get hold of the music, either. An online archive called the High Voltage SID Collection (**http://hvsc.c64.org**) can help out with this. Set up in 1996, this project aims to offer every single piece of music ever created for the SID chip. While they still have some way to go to gather together absolutely everything, they have a substantial amount of material already available, including almost all of the well-known songs ever created.

It's even possible to create new SID music today. A piece of software called GoatTracker (**http://covertbitops.c64.org**) allows the creation of a C64-compatible music. A variety of new compositions appear each year, most of which are then added to the HVSC and often used in games, demos and scene projects.

And what of the SID chip itself? They're obviously no longer being manufactured, but there are many still in existence (over 30 million C64s were sold during its commercial lifespan) and they're popping up in some surprising places.



The first of these places is on a piece of hardware called HardSID (**www.hardsid.com**). This is a PCI sound card (compatible with Windows and Mac OS X) that has a genuine SID chip on board. The card can be used with Sidplay2 and also a number of C64 emulators to provide real playback of sound through the original hardware. An enhanced version, HardSID Quattro, has four SID chips onboard to allow a total of 12 channels of SID sound to be played.

Another piece of hardware, Catweasle MK3 (**www.jschoenfeld.com**), allows a SID chip to be mounted and used in the same way as in the HardSID card. This device is PCI and Zorro card compatible, meaning that it can also be used with the later revisions of the Amiga.

Finally, we have SidStation (**www.sidstation.com**), a complete MIDI synthesiser based on the SID chip. Some impressive examples of the device in action are available on the website.



With the amount of dedication and enthusiasm that still exists in the world of the SID chip, and with the advancements in hardware and emulation technology, it looks like the music – and even the SID itself – is set to live on for many years to come.

Many thanks to Chris Abbott at C64Audio.com and Peter Sandén at the High Voltage SID Collection for their assistance.

>Where are they now?

Most of the musicians from the C64 era have drifted (many by choice) out of the public eye, so we thought we'd try and track them down. Here's what we found out.

Ben Daglish

C64 works include: Ark Pandora, Deflektor, Gauntlet, Kettle, Krakout, Trap.
Now performing with the folk/rock group Loscoe State Opera, producing/directing soundtracks for theatre productions and running an Internet Service Provider.

Martin Galway

C64 works include: Comic Bakery, Miami Vice, Ocean Loader, Rambo, Wizball.
Working in Audio Production for Microsoft Game Studios in the USA (was Audio Director for the recent game Freelancer).

Fred Gray

C64 works include: Breakthru, Enigma Force, Frankie Goes to Hollywood, Batman The Caped Crusader.
Now teaching nursing students how to use computers.

Rob Hubbard

C64 works include: Monty on the Run, Commando, Delta, Sanxion, Thing On A Spring, Thrust.
Worked as audio technical director at Electronic Arts in the USA, before recently leaving for a job as a musical director on a cruise ship.

Richard Joseph

C64 works include: Barbarian, Defender of the Crown, Rimrunner, Sacred Armour of Antiriad.
Working as audio director at Elixir Studios. Recent work includes audio direction for the game Republic: The Revolution.

Jeroen Tel

C64 works include: Cybernoid I and II, Hawkeye, Savage, Turbo Outrun.
Still making music with the Maniacs of Noise – information and downloads at **www.maniacsofnoise.nl**.

David Whittaker

C64 works include: BMX Simulator, Feud, Glider Rider, IO, Street Surfer.
Working and composing computer game music at Jester Interactive.

>Danger! High Voltage!



We spoke to Peter Sandén, one of the maintainers of the High Voltage SID Collection, in order to find out some more about the project.

RG: How did the HVSC get started? Whose idea was it to create a definitive archive of all the original C64 music?

PS: The HVSC project started in May 1996 when 'The Shark' decided to merge many SID collections available on the Internet into one big collection. The previous SID collections contained many bugged SIDs, repeats, and inaccurate credits. They were also highly disorganised. A few months later he added two more members to the team, Michael Schwendt and 'Rambones'. As they merged the collections, they began to realise that many famous SIDs were missing. This led the HVSC crew and many others to begin searching various C64 software archives for more SIDs to rip.

Due to this effort the collection began to grow at an enormous rate, and the members grew with the collection. As we progressed we noticed that many inconsistencies and questions started to surface. For example, we would find a piece of music credited to a famous composer yet the style of the music was completely different from his normal style.

One sure way of solving these mysteries was to contact the original composers. Over time we gradually tracked several of them down and received a tremendous amount of information.

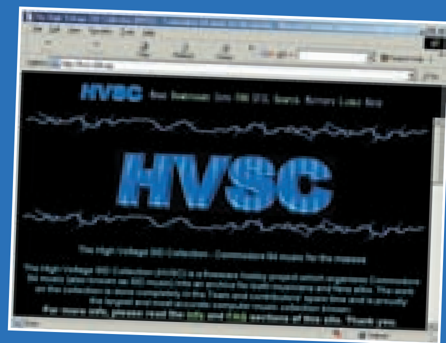
RG: Have you had any problems getting hold of the music to be included in the HVSC, such as copyright problems, technical problems (software protection etc.), or simply finding a source for a tune?

PS: Copyright problems... Yes, but only minor ones. Some composers were unhappy at first but we eventually worked out a better relationship. Most of them are really happy to see that their old work is being preserved, and they often enjoy hearing their work again after all this time. We are fortunate in that most of the collection is abandonware.

There have been some technical problems however. I remember a few years ago when Simon White introduced Sidplay2 to us – a lot of tunes stopped working. Simon finally gave us a cycle accurate player and then the new goal was to make all rips compatible with a real C64. As time goes by, Simon improves the C64 compatibility in Sidplay2, and we have to fix some more tunes.

Other ripping difficulties have mostly been from really old games where the coders made the music themselves and spread the code all over the memory. This takes an enormous amount of time and skill to successfully rip. When it comes to demo tunes, sometimes a tune was badly ripped from another production and picked up bugs or corruption on the way, so when we rip from the demo, it's impossible to make a 100% working rip.

Even some original games had tunes that bugged out after a while. Most of these have been fixed by correcting the code or modifying the music data, and were then verified by the author to be a 100% accurate version.



RG: How and where do you get new material for each of the new revisions of the HVSC?

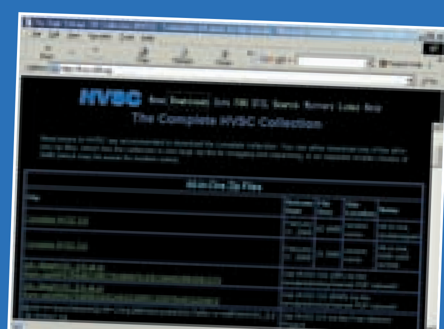
PS: Getting material for the collection is not hard. There are plenty of tunes missing and more tunes are being released all the time. We contact the composers, and sometimes get hold of their disks, and can provide the collection with long lost tunes, and even unreleased tunes.

Gamebase64 (**www.gamebase64.com**) has a database with C64 games, and from that database we know which games we still have to rip the music from. I also have several CDs of C64 disks. It's harder to get people to help out ripping so that we can continue providing the best collection available, so if anyone out there has the skills to rip tunes and wants to help out, please get in touch!

RG: How many people work on the HVSC? How much effort is involved in each new revision?

PS: Currently there are 12 members of the crew, but we also get some help from external contributors. It's hard to say how much work we put into each update, because there are a lot of steps before we can release each one.

First of all, it takes time to rip the tunes and check that they're working on both Sidplay2 and on a real C64. Then we try to verify credits with the authors (even published games sometimes have incorrect credits.) Next we have a guy who builds the update script, and put all our newly collected tunes into the update. After this we test the update on various platforms to be sure it's working properly on them all. Finally our STIL (SID Tune Information List) administrator compiles an updated STIL.txt file.



RG: What can we expect in the future from HVSC?

PS: We've released some quite big updates recently to get rid of our backlog of SIDs. We had around 4,000 unreleased tunes lying around. After the next update our unreleased archive will be empty and we'll need to rip new tunes for all forthcoming updates, so it might take a while longer between the updates after the next one and they might be smaller as well. I'm quite sure we'll pass the 30,000 SIDs mark within the next few years. RG*

eMag





>Creature Feature

This summer sees the release of the Alien vs Predator movie, the long-waited title fight between cinema's gruesome twosome. The Dark Horse comic on which the film is based has spawned several tie-in games, and there have been a good number of games based on the Alien and Predator film franchises. Martyn Carroll takes a look at these sci-fi spin-offs, and discovers that not all film licences are rubbish

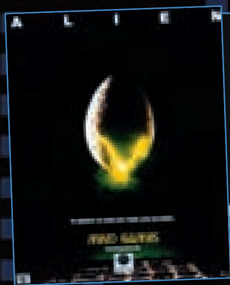
Since the release of the first Alien movie 25 years ago, 20th Century Fox has secured itself an immensely popular franchise on which a massive fan-base thrives. Proving to be both a commercial and critical success, the film has since spawned three sequels and numerous spin-offs, including the customary software licence. Over the years, each Alien film has been converted to various platforms by a number of publishers.

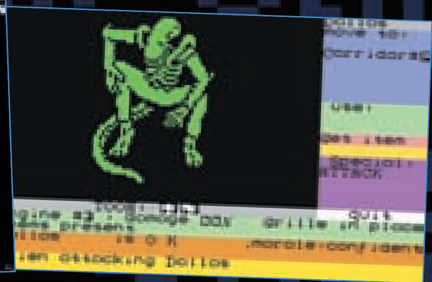
The original Alien film attracted two publishers who approached the licence in contrasting ways. The first was released on the Atari 2600 in 1982 by Fox itself which ripped off not one but two classic arcade games. The first level was pure Pac-man, with you trapped in a maze with the Aliens (yes, there was more than one). You simply had to blast them with what appeared to be a flamethrower and then leg it. The second stage was a Frogger rip-off, although it more closely resembled Activision's Freeway. The idea was to cross a room while avoiding the Aliens whizzing from left to right. If you managed to reach the other side then it looped back to the maze. Like many of its peers, the game was ugly and repetitive and failed to capture either the excitement or suspense of the movie.

Alien legacy

In 1984, Argus Press software secured the licence from Fox and unleashed Alien on the Sinclair Spectrum and Commodore 64. Released as part of its Mind Games series, this strategic adventure also featured plenty of grim graphics but aspired to test nerves as opposed to reflexes. This aim was evident in the advertising campaign which promoted the game as being genuinely scary and featured the memorable but ridiculous caution: "Warning! Do not play this in the dark!". So with the lights safely on, you had to fulfil the role of ship commander and make crucial decisions in a bid to locate and destroy the slimy, interstellar hitch-hiker. In reality, the removed approach (events unfolded via a top-down plan view) and the lack of immediacy (characters often ignored your commands) meant that the game could never live up to Argus' linen-staining intentions.







Released while the film was causing cinema audiences to regurgitate their crisps and coke, tempted fans who were too young to see the movie forked out a massive £9.99 for their piece of Alien pie. Shortly after, pocket-money stashes were threatened again when Activision's American division announced that it had developed a game based on the film and planned to release it in the UK as Aliens: The Second Part. In a bid to annul accusations that the company was exploiting the licence, the sequel tag was removed and the game was promoted as an alternative take entitled Aliens US and released in 1988.

Unfortunately, multi-sectioned licences were becoming popular and this title was one of the original perpetrators. Basically, Aliens US was a straightforward translation of the film in which certain action scenes inspired various mini-games. Tucked untidily between two interesting first-person perspective stages (the opening dropship manoeuvre and the closing battle with the Alien Queen) were four similar plan-view levels which all featured small characters with big guns. Like many other compendium titles, Aliens US offered some diversity but failed to create a satisfying whole as each stage played like a hollow snippet. In contrast, the original Aliens game focused its attention on one of the film's key sequences and the results were far more enduring.

First-person thrills

In subtle contrast, Activision's Aliens offered a similar strategic experience, but the action was now viewed via the marine's headgear cameras. As a result, the subjective perspective heightened the suspense and succeeded in creating a welcome degree of atmosphere. Even more impressive was the clever game structure which involved switching control between the film's main characters. Back in the 8-bit days of 1987, this idea was revolutionary and perfectly captured the sense of comradeship that runs through the movie. Team tactics proved to be a must if you were to succeed in ridding the 250-room colony of the Alien Queen and her deadly spawn.





The Alien attacks were brief but memorable. Each squad member was fitted with a motion sensor which beeped when movement was detected. As the sound proliferated, you'd turn and glimpse the Alien's hunched attack. Before you could say "we're in some real pretty shit now man", its jaws dripped open and the monitor blinked out in a blur of static. If you were quicker, you may have been able to lift your sights and halt its advance with a gun blast to the cranium. Trigger-happy marines had to be careful though as your sensor picked up all life-forms, making it all too easy to gun down one of your own team.







Run and gun

While Ocean Software set about monopolising this form of licensing, Probe was busy developing Alien 3 as an archetypal platform game. Published by Acclaim and released in 1993 on just about every format known to man, the game adopted the film's mining prison premise and then infested the location with numerous Aliens to create a sprawling shoot-em-up. This action-oriented slant was understandable as the dialogue-driven film featured few set-pieces, a single enemy and, critically, no firearms. As one of the undeniable attractions of the Alien games is the ability to blast those oversized bugs, you can imagine the developers gasping "No guns?"! They unsurprisingly conceded and equipped Ripley with her standard arsenal – pulse rifle, flame thrower and grenade launcher.





Thankfully, the game was not overly reliant on quick reflexes as you had to work through a series of missions in order to continue. These objectives ranged from maintenance duties to rescue operations and

collectively provided the player with a sense of purpose. Your overall goal, however, was far more primordial – prevent the Aliens from multiplying by destroying the Queen residing in the foundry.

Lifting some style from the sedate film, Alien 3 was visually impressive and featured plenty of subtle touches which extended beyond parallax scrolling and smooth sprite animation. Examples included the rain storms on the planet's surface and the humid mist which lingered in the colonised tunnels. Later, Probe would go on to develop these techniques to even better effect in its subsequent Alien Trilogy. Before that success though, the Aliens found themselves battling it out with a familiar foe.

Grudge match

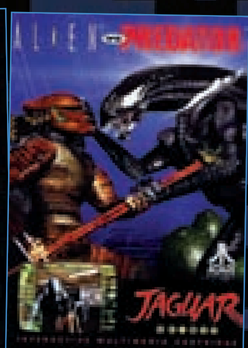
Drawing inspiration from the Dark Horse comics of the same name, Activision backed a small-screen scrap between the two races. Released on the SNES in 1993, and complimented by a scaled-down GameBoy version (sub-titled The Last of His Clan), Alien vs Predator was a scrolling beat-em-up, and a poor one at that. Playing as a lone Predator, and set far into the future, the aim was to rid a space colony of attacking Aliens. For a beat-em-up, the Predator had a surprisingly small set of moves, so the constant button bashing quickly became boring.





Much better was 1994's Alien vs Predator on the ill-fated Atari Jaguar. While the title characters stole the show, the game cleverly constructed a triangular all-against-all structure by dropping a small band of marines into the mix. Impressively, each playable challenger came complete with their own personal strengths – the marines were heavily armed, the Predators possessed chameleonic devices (allowing for some simple stealth action) and the Aliens could shift about far more quickly than the other two. The opportunity to play with different characters increased the replay value and lifted this first-person shooter above many of the Doom clones.





The failure of the Jaguar as a successful platform meant that the game was sadly overlooked by many fans, despite it being the console's killer app. Incidentally, Alien Trilogy almost befell the same fate as it was originally planned for release on Sega's Mega-CD. Probe wisely waited and in 1996 found itself in the proverbial right place at the right time, and was able to deliver the game to a captive 32-bit audience.

Trilogy of terror

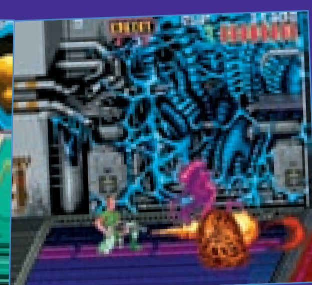
As the title suggests, Probe took elements from each of the first three films and created a game accurately publicised as a "black-death, white-

>Alien arcade games

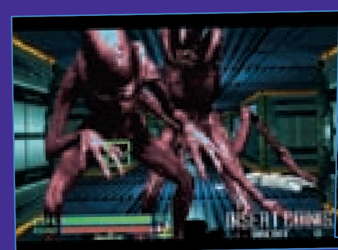
The local arcade was home to three great games based on the Alien films. Whereas the games for home computers and consoles tried to instil the horror elements of the series, the arcade titles sacked all that off in favour of head-spinning, palm-sweating, coin-grabbing action.

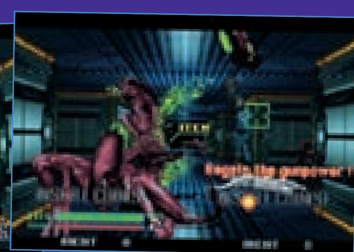
First up was Konami's Aliens, which was released in 1990 but based on the 1986 movie. The game took the form of a side-scrolling shoot-em-up, with psuedo-3D stages thrown in for good measure, and threw wave after wave of Aliens at Ripley and/or Hicks. Konami exerted a little artistic licence in places, with flying Aliens, flame-spitting Aliens and the like, but overall the game was faithful to the action-oriented second movie. And like the film, it ended in fine style – see this month's Endgame on page 114.





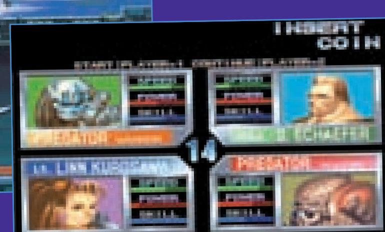
1993 saw the release of Sega's Alien 3: The Gun, an on-rails lightgun shooter which surely served as a precursor to the House of the Dead games. If the film was slow-moving, the game was a full-on action-fest, never letting up for a single second. If James Cameron had directed the third film then perhaps this is what it would've been like. As with all lightgun games, it could be completed in no time at all, but it was certainly fun while it lasted.





Finally we have Capcom's Alien vs Predator. It was released in 1994, the same year as the Jaguar game, but bore no resemblance. In many ways it was an update of Final Fight, with players taking control of either a Predator or a human in a bid to wipe out the Alien race. Having Predators and humans fighting alongside each other was a nice touch, and you could even play as Major Dutch Schaefer (Schwarzenegger's character from the original Predator movie, although he didn't look or sound much like Arnie). This was Capcom doing what it did best, and it's still very playable today.



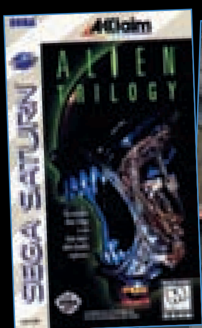


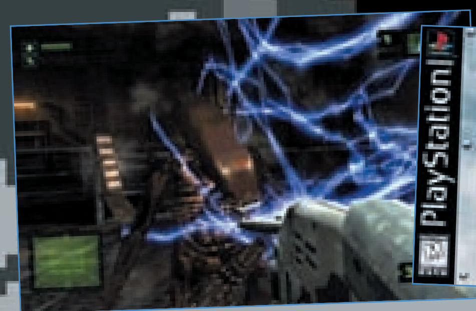
knuckle nightmare". While Alien Trilogy utilised a standard first-person engine, the game improved on the earlier licences by scouring its sources and accurately replicating an atmospheric sci-fi film world. Mazes of dull metallic corridors lay before you, the darkness often punctuated by the flicker of faulty neon lighting which offered brief glimpses of your enemy. Less immediate but just as important was the game's understated soundtrack which, like the best sci-fi scores, opposed dramatic segments with periods of near-silence. The overall effect was impressive – mere involvement gave way to immersion as the player was slowly drawn in.

Despite these filmic touches, the frequency of the Alien attacks ensured that the emphasis was still firmly on action. As the movies managed to gel together the genres of action, science-fiction and horror, it would appear that Probe only satisfied the first two styles. Blasting Aliens could be fun and even frenzied, but it generated very little fear. Even the Alien vs Predator games, rescued from Atari obscurity and reworked for the PC, failed to hike up the horror. The stunning audio-visual effects certainly captured the "haunted house in space" feel of the films but this gun-blazing game demanded durable thumbs over steady nerves. The balance between the relevant game genres remained elusive until Alien Resurrection arrived on the PlayStation.

Heart-stopping horror

When Fox announced plans to continue the series with Alien Resurrection back in 1996, videogame details were duly released. And after an abnormally long gestation period, the game finally arrived in 2000, care of Argonaut. To say it was worth the wait would be a sinful understatement. The game featured lightning-fast visuals, huge mission-driven levels, five playable characters, some clever AI (Alien Intelligence) and a series of original cutscenes. Best of all, it managed to provide all of these features while sustaining the suspense and the shocks throughout. It was the perfect marriage of survival horror adventure and first person shooter. Yes, it was perhaps a little too difficult for its own good (how long between save points?), and yes, playing an FPS with a joypad has never been the easiest thing in the world, but Alien Resurrection stands out as the best Alien game to date, and one of the finest film licences in recent years. Its release couldn't have been timed worse – coinciding as it did with the PlayStation 2 launch – so you may have overlooked this gem of a game. Do yourself a favour and dig it out. RG*

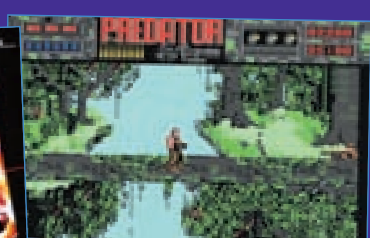



>Predatory nature

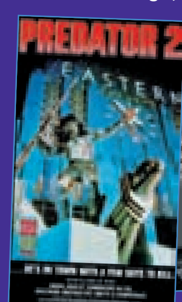
As there have only been a couple of Predator movies, it's hardly surprising that there's only a few licensed games. It's somewhat more surprising that all of them are poor, especially when you consider that the source material surely lends itself well to a videogame.





Activision's original tie-in was released in 1987, roughly around the same time as the movie, and appeared on both 8-bit and 16-bit computers. The Amiga and Atari ST versions obviously looked better than their 8-bit counterparts, but the by-the-numbers gameplay remained the same. Following an admittedly impressive opening sequence, in which the Predator's ship circles the Earth, the action shifted to the dense South American jungle. Taking control of Arnie, you first had to deal with the local guerrilla fighters. Arnie may have been invincible in the film, but here you'd be lucky to advance three steps without being gunned down in a rain of bullets. To make matters worse, that pesky Predator would then set its sights on you, forcing you to run quickly into another fire-fight. If you persevered (or more likely poked the game) you'd eventually bump into the Predator, and even get the chance to kill it with a falling log trap, just like in the film. Only those with the patience of a saint would get that far though.

Two years later, Activision released a similar game for the NES. Again, this was a side-scrolling shooter, but there was more emphasis on running and jumping than ducking and dying. Similarly, alternative versions of Predator 2 were released for consoles and computers. Acclaim handled the console version, turning out a passable top-down shooter, while Image Works created an Operation Wolf clone for home computers. The idea was to clean up the streets, wasting the no-good drug pushers, while simultaneously dealing with the Predator which would show up from time to time. It was tough – too tough – and as forgettable as the disappointing film. Hopefully Ubi Soft's upcoming Predator game, sub-titled Concrete Jungle, will fare better.






eMag


SILVERBIRD
FIREBIRD



>Memories of Telecomsoft

British Telecom entered the videogames market in 1984, with the Telecomsoft division launching the popular Firebird label. The Rainbird and Silverbird labels followed, yet at the height of its success, Telecomsoft was sold to MicroProse. Richard Hewison worked for Telecomsoft and here he charts the fascinating history of his former employer

Telecomsoft was instigated in the spring of 1984 by the General Manager of BT's Information Services division, Dr Ederyn Williams. Dr Williams and Richard Hooper (Chief Executive of BT's Value Added Systems) had been looking at the strategic issue of 'network versus content' with Prestel. With networking likely to become cheaper in the future, it was reasoned that content would become the more valuable commodity. With that in mind, it was decided that BT would enter the publishing arena to create content, and the publishing labels Firebird, Rainbird and Silverbird were the result.

Help wanted!

In May 1984, BT started looking for titles from hopeful games programmers. It advertised in newspapers and placed full-colour adverts in the computer magazines as Firefly Software. The copy for the full-page advert read:

Turning a great idea into a profitable idea isn't easy. It needs skill, patience and sheer hard work. But to be really profitable, it also needs the backing of a large, respected company. At British Telecom we are now looking for writers of games and educational programs to help us launch a new and exciting range of software. If we like your idea we'll send you a cheque straightaway as an advance on royalties. Then we'll package your program, advertise it and distribute it with the care and attention you'd expect from one of Britain's biggest companies.

The response was positive, with a large number of games sent in for evaluation. Soon after the advert went to press, Tony Rainbird was enticed away from his own fledgling software house (Micro-Gold) and was persuaded to join the company. In July 1984, James Leavey was transferred from within BT to handle the marketing and PR side of the business. Finally, James Scoular was headhunted from Personal Computer Games magazine and employed as the head of Firefly, although the name had to be changed to Firebird at the last moment for legal reasons.

After employing market analysts to examine the software publishing arena, it was decided that Firebird would have two price points: £2.50 was set for the 'Firebird Silver Range', whilst 'Firebird Gold' titles would be sold at £5.95.

The official press release from BT went to great lengths to emphasise that the packaging for the Silver range would have screenshots of the games on the cover, rather than potentially misleading artwork. Richard Hooper was quoted as saying: "You can now judge a game by its cover. In a market where quality and prices tend to be variable and complaints of misrepresentation frequent, Firebird is setting new standards." He went on to comment on the pricing issue: "Despite the pocket-money price, Firebird games will offer the same quality as some products costing twice as much. Firebird is committed to the home computer market and will deal only through established distributors."



At £2.50, the Silver Range of games were amongst the cheapest on the shelves, undercut only by Mastertronic

The original advert, from 'Firefly Software', tempted programmers with talk of hard cash



Taking off

Released in time for Christmas 1984, Snake Bite for the Commodore VIC-20 was the first Firebird release. The games that followed were Mickey the Bricky, Bird Strike, Gold Digger, Duck!, Run Baby Run (written by Tony Rainbird), Exodus, Terra Force, Menace and Viking Raiders.

These first releases covered a wide range of formats, including the VIC-20, Commodore 64, the BBC Micro and the Sinclair Spectrum.

All of the initial Firebird releases were arcade shoot-em-ups of one type or another, with the exception of Viking Raiders, which was a turn-based war game for the Spectrum. This first wave of Firebird releases went down well with the public, selling over 250,000 copies within the first three months of hitting the shelves. The second batch followed soon after, and included Byte Bitten, The Wild Bunch, Acid Drops, Mr Freeze, Booty, Crazy Caverns, Estra, The Hacker, Headache, Zulu and GoGo the Ghost.

Again, most of these were arcade games with the exception of The Wild Bunch, which was an adventure game with some arcade elements thrown in for good measure. By then, Amstrad CPC conversions of some of the games were also being released as that machine's popularity began to increase. At the same time, the BBC Micro and VIC-20 were on the decline and both would ultimately be removed from Telecomsoft's portfolio.

The first of the higher priced Firebird Gold titles were also released, including Demons of Topaz, Buggy Blast (co-written by future Rainbird Publisher, Paul Hibbard) and Gyron, which had the added incentive of giving the player a chance to win a Porsche 924 LUX or cash equivalent. The eventual winner was 16-year-old Juian Manuel Perez Vazquez, who opted for the £12,800 cash prize! Firebird Gold went on to publish a number of classic games over the next few years, including



Snake Bite, the very first Firebird game, appeared on the unexpanded VIC-20



The original Silver Range broke the mould and actually displayed screenshots on the cover

Elite, Cholo, both Revs and Revs+, and The Sentinel to name just a few. The latter two titles were written by programming legend, Geoff Crammond, who is still writing racing games today, in the form of the successful F1 Grand Prix series.

Herbie Wright was employed in January 1985 as Project Manager for Firebird Gold, leaving James Leavey to concentrate on Firebird Silver. Sadly, James Scoular died from a heart attack in March 1985, forcing a reshuffling of the managerial pack. In April 1985, Joss Ellis was brought in as Contract Development Manager, which involved working on the Gold label and establishing the Firebird Hot range.



Buggy Blast was one of the first Firebird Gold titles to be released

Elite and Beyond

Acornsoft had a huge hit with David Braben and Ian Bell's classic space trading game Elite on the BBC Micro and Acorn Electron formats during 1984. When the rights to publish conversions of Elite were put up for auction, Telecomsoft entered into a sealed bidding war with a number of other publishers. This was an auction that Telecomsoft won, paying an undisclosed sum for the rights.

Firebird eventually published nine conversions of Elite across eight different formats (the PC had two versions, one coded by 3D experts Realtime Games, and a few years later came Elite Plus, augmenting the first version with code by Chris Sawyer). The first conversion of Elite published by Firebird was for the Commodore 64, written by the original authors and released in 1985. Ian Bell then coded the Apple II conversion himself. Torus (who had created Gyron) handled the Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions, whilst Mr Micro wrote an MSX version a year or so later, and immediately followed this up with the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga versions in 1988.

The Elite conversions were a major success; reviews were almost universally positive and sales were equally impressive. This success opened the doors to allow Telecomsoft to expand in a big way. One of its first acquisitions was Beyond Software. Owned by EMAP, Beyond had published a string of distinctive and successful 8-bit titles, including Mike Singelton's Lords of Midnight and Doomdark's Revenge. Beyond had also published the icon-driven graphic adventures Shadowfire and Enigma Force, developed by Denton Designs.

At the time of the sale, Bill Delaney, Managing Director of Beyond said: "We have no qualms about going to BT and are happy that they've taken us on. There won't be any significant changes in Beyond. We will continue with our planned range of products." A number of staff working for Beyond joined Telecomsoft as part of the deal, including Peter Moreland, a Project Manager whose previous work had included Colossal Adventure and Mordon's Quest for Melbourne House with John-Jones Steele.

Telecomsoft's ownership of Beyond saw it publish and produce conversions of First Star's Superman as well as the Amstrad CPC conversions of Doomdark's Revenge, Enigma Force, the C64-only games Quake Minus One and Dante's Inferno, and release a compilation for the Spectrum called The Best of Beyond, which contained Doomdark's Revenge, Shadowfire, Enigma Force and Sorderon's Shadow.

Star Trek: The Rebel Universe and Dark Sceptre were originally advertised as games on the Beyond label, but ultimately they were published as Firebird titles. By 1987, the Beyond label was quietly phased out and officially laid to rest.



Acquiring the rights to Elite was a smart move on Telecomsoft's part, and the classic game appeared on numerous platforms

The Ultimate deal

Telecomsoft negotiated with Ultimate to develop and distribute Commodore 64 versions of Sabre Wulf, Underwurlde and Nightshade. These were games that had been massive hits on other 8-bit platforms. For its own reasons, Ultimate preferred to develop original C64 games rather than revisit its older titles, so Firebird hired Mr Micro to convert Sabre Wulf, Softstone to tackle Underwurlde and PSI to handle Nightshade.

Press reaction to the conversions was lukewarm at best, mainly because they were identical to the Spectrum originals, which by then were over a year old. It's therefore interesting to note that today, these C64 conversions by Firebird are highly sought-after on eBay, and can fetch up to five times their original retail price!

Ultimate's classics were straight ports of the Spectrum originals

Flying west

As the conversions of Elite were gaining momentum, it was decided that it was time to have a presence in the United States. Marten Davies was employed as a consultant for Dr Ederyn Williams

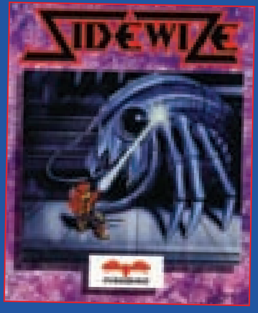
Acquiring Odin

Thanks to the success of Elite, Telecomsoft also splashed out and bought Odin, a developer and publisher based in Liverpool which had a number of hits including Nodes of Yesod and Robin of the Wood on the Spectrum. Odin consisted of a number of programmers, graphic artists and musicians including Steve Wetherill, Stuart Fotheringham, Marc Dawson, Keith Robinson, Paul Salmon, Colin Grunes, Robbie Tinman, Keith Tinman, George Barnes, Tommy Laningan and Derrick Rowson.

The Odin team was contracted to write 10 titles for its new owners. The first few were published under the Odin label (ICUPS, Hypaball, Mission A.D. and Heartland) and the rest under Firebird or the Firebird Silver £1.99 range (The Plot, On the Tiles, UFO, Scary Monsters, SPUD and Sidewize). Unfortunately, the games didn't sell as well as expected, and Odin was eventually shut down. A handful of other Odin titles were in development at the time, including a game called PLOD, a game about the RMS Lusitania, and a Gladiator-style fighting game. None of these titles ever saw the light of day. However, Firebird did publish a sequel to Sidewize in 1987. Called Crosswize, the game was written by former Odin coder Steve Wetherill, with graphics by another ex-Odin employee, Colin Grunes.


The Odin team, looking cheerful, presumably before the sale to Telecomsoft





ICUPS and the other initial releases retained the Odin branding. Later games like Sidewize were published under the Firebird brand

when he was tasked with setting up the US office. Marten arrived on 5 August 1985 and started the company out of the basement of a rented house on Church Street, in Ramsey, New Jersey.

The first few months were funded by using an American Express card to buy fax machines, computers and pay for travel costs. Paul Bader was the first hired employee, tempted away from an educational book publishing company to become National Sales Manager.

The operation had to be set up at some speed, as the newly formed company needed to hit the Christmas market that year. It was therefore incorporated as Firebird Licensees Inc. in September. Back in the UK office, John Fletcher burned the midnight oil to get the packaging, advertisements and software compatibility issues sorted for the US products.

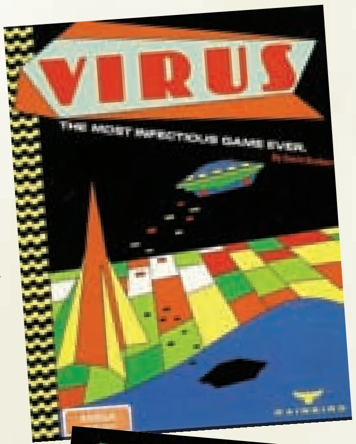
The first shipment of product went out on 8 October 1985, just two months after Marten Davies had set foot on US soil. Amongst the small handful of initial releases were the C64 and Apple IIe conversions of Elite. The Apple version had to be recalled soon after release when it was discovered that it didn't work correctly on the Apple IIc (due to the Caps Lock key not being disabled). Thankfully, a swift fix and turnaround remedied the situation.

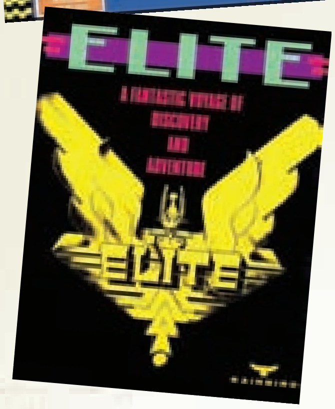
The first Firebird advertisement published in the US was for Elite, with the heading "20 million Americans are about to become dangerous". The amount of interest the advert generated helped kick-start sales, especially when a major US distributor (Computer Software Services) signed up after seeing the advert.

The company began to expand quickly. It migrated from the basement office in New Jersey to a slightly larger 'lean-to' office in a wood yard, but still in New Jersey. People were hired to look after the accounts, and various family members were also drafted into various roles. Rather than hiring a group of sales people, it decided to hire 'reps' for the entire country, working on commission. The first 'rep' group was Target Marketing, run by Steve Routman.

Elite hit the number one spot on the Billboard Magazine software charts in May 1986. It was the first ever UK product to make it to the top of the chart in the US and was a rewarding moment for what was still a small company. Later that same year, Firebird finally moved to proper offices in Waldwick, New Jersey. It also hired Dan Horn as Vice President – Product Development. He dealt with the acquisition of products, market presence and product analysis. He also fine-tuned the British and European products for the US marketplace. Dan developed product-line strategies and created new product proposals, and was instrumental in the acquisition of Bantam products for Firebird in the US. This included the Bantam adventure Sherlock Holmes for the IBM PC and Tandy Jr, and I, Damiano for the Apple II.

Occasionally, the European title had to be changed for the US market. For example, The Sentinel by Geoff Crammond was changed to The Sentry (thanks to a game called Sentinel already being available in the US), and Maelstrom's Whirligig became Space Cutter.





The US versions featured alternative boxart, and are quite collectable today



Starglider, The Pawn and Carrier Command were just some of the classic games that appeared on the Rainbird release schedule



The budget range was relaunched with the new Super Silver branding

Raining down

With the emergence of the 16-bit machines in 1985, Telecomsoft decided to expand into a completely new publishing label. The plan was to offer more mature titles, including utilities and adventure games. This new label was originally going to be called Bluebird, but was changed to Rainbird after it was discovered that the original choice was already registered to another company. It also just *happened* to be Tony Rainbird's surname, and it fitted in with the 'bird' theme that Telecomsoft had already established with Firebird.

The original logo designed for Bluebird was retained despite the name change, as was the blue colour scheme for the packaging. Whilst Firebird games were released in clear plastic crystal cases, Rainbird titles were put in sturdy, glossy blue cardboard boxes to give the impression of a higher quality product. Many Rainbird titles also included novellas, large manuals, posters and other value added items.

The first few Rainbird titles were The OCP Art Studio and The Music Studio for the 8-bit systems, and Starglider and The Pawn for the new 16-bit Atari ST and Commodore Amiga platforms. Both Starglider and The Pawn would eventually be converted onto almost every format going, including Apple Mac, IBM PC, MSX, C64, Spectrum and the 8-bit Atari. Rainbird went on to publish many classic games for both 8-bit and 16-bit platforms, including four more Magnetic Scrolls adventures, three Level 9 releases, a sequel to Starglider, Realtime's 3D wargame Carrier Command, Tracker, Legend of the Sword and The Universal Military Simulator (UMS), which became Rainbird's first number one title in both Europe and the US.

Not too long after Rainbird was established, the eponymous Tony decided to leave Rainbird and pursue a different career with Inter-Mediates Ltd, a business that today includes the members-only mail order company Special Reserve amongst its interests.

Ringing the changes

Unlike Rainbird, Firebird went through a number of corporate identity changes during its BT days. The premium Firebird label, Firebird Gold, became a full-price label with games starting at £9.95. Firebird Hot was therefore introduced as a mid price-point label, with games like Runestone, Rasputin, Costa Capers and Gerry the Germ Goes Body Poppin' being sold at £7.95. Both labels eventually disappeared, and the full-price label simply became known as Firebird.

The original budget range added a Firebird Super Silver label fairly early on, with games like Thunderbirds, Willow Pattern, Chimera and Don't Panic. They were packaged in slightly larger, fragile, white plastic clamshell cases with artwork instead of screenshots on the cover. A year or so later, the entire budget portfolio was merged under the Firebird Silver £1.99 range label. Out went the screenshots on the cover, and a number of early Firebird Silver games like Chickin Chase, Booty and Collapse were re-released with new artwork.

The budget range also adopted colour coding on the inlays for different game formats. Spectrum games were yellow, Commodore games were red, Amstrad CPC games were orange, Atari 8-bit games were green, BBC/Electron were pale blue, C16/+4 were purple.

A few years later, the budget range was changed again. With the Firebird brand now destined for full-priced games (once Firebird Gold and Firebird Hot were dropped), a new identity for the budget range was needed. In keeping with the 'bird' theme, Silverbird was launched in late 1987 as the new publishing model for budget games.

A new stripy packaging design was adopted, with red and black stripes for £1.99 8-bit releases, and yellow and black for £2.99 games. The handful of 16-bit Atari ST Silverbird releases (priced at £9.95) used blue and black stripes. The budget range was managed in-house for Telecomsoft by Colin Fuidge and assisted by Jo Bonar.



The Firebird Hot range. These games could seriously damage our Quickshot II

Five free games were offered in a prize draw if customers wrote to Telecomsoft and expressed their opinion on the new Silverbird brand, and current Silverbird releases were advertised inside the new packaging (either with colour screenshots or as a list).

Almost all of the Silverbird titles were new to budget, including a straight-to-budget conversion of a little-known 1986 Atari coin-op called Peter Packrat, and the usual mix of original games (eg European 5-A-Side) and budget releases of other publishers' titles, including both Cauldron and Starstrike games, I of the Mask and Dynamite Dan.

The Silverbird logo was a silver version of the previous Firebird logo but with a new font. The Firebird logo, meanwhile, was updated. The red flaming wings on the logo were pushed upwards in a more dynamic pose. This change helped give all three brands a distinctive look. The new Firebird logo was also given a motto for the first time, proclaiming it to be "A legend in games software".

Telecomsoft for sale

By the end of 1988, Rainbird had gained a strong reputation in the adventure game market, mainly as a result of the Magnetic Scrolls

One that got away

Back in the late 80s, EPT was an infamous solid 3D space game in development at Rainbird. The acronym (which was a working title) stood for 'Elite Piss Take'. EPT was being developed for the Commodore Amiga and Atari ST by Andy Beveridge, Adrian Stephens and Ricardo Pinto. Ricardo started out as a programmer with Torus and later joined Telecomsoft and became Development Manager, before leaving and joining the EPT developers in an attempt to get the game finished.

Ricardo's first job was to create a new game design that could resurrect the project. EPT's new game design was pure 'space opera'. It had space battles, exploring space stations, talking with other space pilots, and much more besides. To go from planet to planet and solar system to solar system, the player had to enter a cryogenic chamber and speed up time by entering cryogenic sleep. The development versions allowed the player to either enter cryogenic sleep and thus reach the next planet in a few minutes (game-time), or they could travel to the next destination in real-time, which would have taken months!

A number of people within the Product Department thought that EPT was a little ambitious, even for the ST and Amiga. A few doubts were raised as to whether a game would emerge from the 3D demos. The latter development versions of EPT apparently had much more for the player to do but the doubts obviously still remained.

A month or two before the game was dropped, Telecomsoft tried to come up with a viable alternative title for EPT. One of the suggestions was Frontier (as in "Space, the final frontier"). Interesting then that the eventual sequel to Elite (published in 1993 by Gametek & Konami) was called Frontier: Elite 2, although it was obviously a coincidence lost on most people.

It was never completely clear why EPT was cancelled in 1988. Maybe it was because Telecomsoft already had two space games in development – namely Argonaut's Starglider 2 and Mr Micro's conversions of Elite for the ST and Amiga. There were also rumours that it might have affected Telecomsoft's hopes of landing the true sequel to Elite, although this was never confirmed.



Booty before and after. Screenshots were replaced with artwork for the new £1.99 range

and Level 9 releases. The label also gained a good following from the wargame and strategy players thanks to other releases like Universal Military Simulator (UMS) and Carrier Command. Meanwhile, Firebird was also releasing some popular titles including the 16-bit conversions of Elite and David Braben's 3D arcade game, Virus.

It was this success that helped BT decide that it was time to sell the business whilst it was doing well. Telecomsoft had never had a strategic fit within BT, and the decision to become a content provider hadn't worked as well as it had hoped. Paula Byrne (Head of Telecomsoft) was approached in August 1988 and asked to find potential buyers for the business.

One of the possible options was a management buy-out. Whilst this was being discussed within the company, the rumours started that the business might be up for sale. These rumours generated interest from a number of outside companies, which started to approach BT with enquiries and offers to buy the business. However, nothing was made official until it was clear that the management buy-out wasn't going to succeed. The news of Telecomsoft being put up for sale was made official on 24 February 1989, via a BT press release:

British Telecom announced today its intention to sell its entertainment software division, Telecomsoft. Explaining the decision, Mr Tom Baird, Commercial Development Manager, Communication Systems Division, said: "The Nature of British Telecom's business is constantly evolving and entertainment software publishing is no longer consistent with the Company's corporate goals as a world-class supplier of telecommunications and information products and services."

Paula Byrne, General Manager of Telecomsoft added: "Telecomsoft is an established operation which has consistently improved its financial performance, culminating in last year's revenues of close on 6 million. The last two years have seen great achievement for Telecomsoft. As the foremost developer of 16-bit games software in Europe, with three strong brand names – Rainbird, Firebird and Silverbird – the organisation's business has never been stronger." Talks are now being held with a variety of interested parties.

By early April 1989 it became clear to Telecomsoft staff that MicroProse were strong favourites to buy the business. This wasn't totally unexpected, because over the previous six months or so, a small number of staff had left Telecomsoft to join MicroProse. Staff who had left included publisher Paul Hibbard, as well as Pete Moreland and Steve Perry from the Development department.

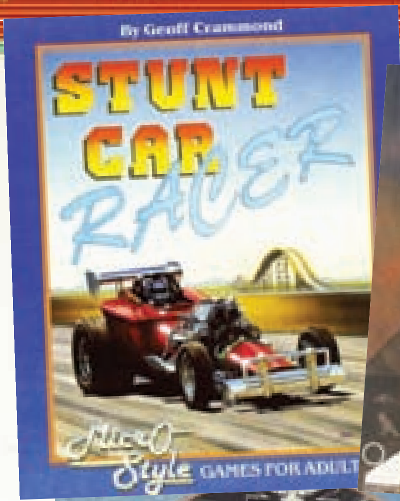
The sale to MicroProse was concluded by BT in late April 1989, and all but a dozen or so staff opted to remain within BT, although many subsequently left to join other software publishers or developers soon afterwards.

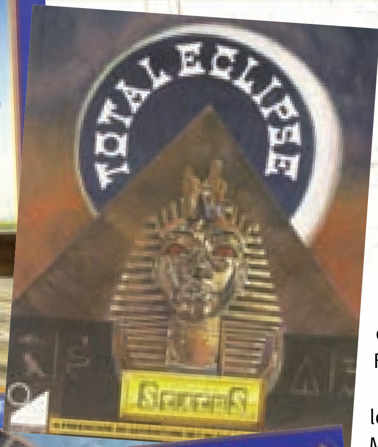
A new dawn?

The first official day of MicroProse ownership was 9 May 1989. All games in development had to be contractually tied up with the new owners, and almost all of them were re-signed with the exception of Graftgold's Rainbow Islands. The sale delayed publication of the Taito coin-op conversions, and Ocean Software snapped up the rights to publish them instead thanks to

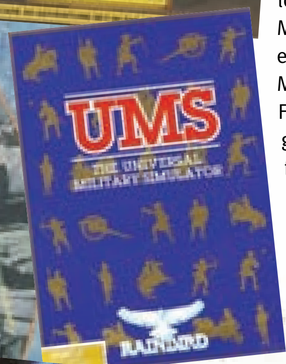


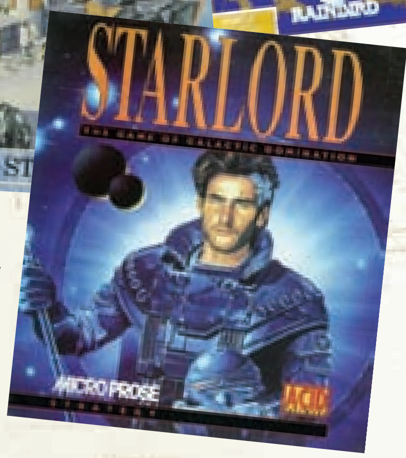
Three different types of packaging used to promote the Silverbird label











After the sale, the various games appeared on a number of different labels

contractual complications between MicroProse and Taito.

The priority for the new owners was to finish all of the remaining titles currently in development as soon as possible. MicroProse had only just launched two new labels – MicroStatus and MicroStyle ("Games for adults") – so they suddenly found themselves with six different publishing labels. This resulted in the Silverbird budget range being sold on to another company, and a number of game titles moving to different publishing labels within the business.

First to change labels was Geoff Crammond's Stunt Car Racer, which was moved from Firebird to MicroStyle. Graftgold's Simulcra also moved to MicroStyle. Rainbird lost Starlord to MicroProse, but gained UMS II: Nations at War (which was going to be a MicroProse release after Rainbird originally lost out on the sequel). Rainbird also gained Midwinter and Tower of Babel.

Some of the staff who signed up with MicroProse remained in London, but had to move out of the New Oxford Street office into a small one-room office near Victoria Station. They remained there until that office was closed down in mid-October 1989. The remaining London-based staff then moved to the MicroProse HQ in Tetbury, Gloucestershire, or took voluntary redundancy.

Almost all of the titles that had been in development under BT ownership were published within a year of the sale. This included conversions of Carrier Command and Starglider 2, Elite Plus, Core Design's Rick Dangerous, coin-op conversions of Action Fighter, P47 and Mr Heli, the Oriental Games beat-em-up, Paul Shirley's Quartz, Rainbird's Contact (published as First Contact) and the strategy game Epoch (published as Betrayal).

MicroProse didn't publish any new Firebird titles afterwards, preferring to use its MicroStyle label instead. As a result, Firebird was quietly retired from games publishing. MicroProse's own MicroStatus label also disappeared after only a handful of releases that included the Freescape 3D game Total Eclipse.

Rainbird lasted a year or so longer, mainly thanks to Maelstrom's futuristic strategy epic Midwinter and its sequel, Midwinter II: The Flames of Freedom. Maelstrom's other game, Starlord, finally arrived a few years later under the MicroProse label, but by then, Rainbird had also been laid to rest.

In hindsight

Telecomsoft had a diverse product range, thanks to the three labels that offered something for everyone. It had a great mix of developers, with the likes of David Braben, Geoff Crammond, Bullfrog, Core and Argonaut – all of whom are still going strong today in one form or another. Some of the games that Telecomsoft published almost 20 years ago are still held in high regard by players and developers alike.

Although there had been some internal upheavals with a handful of staff leaving in the months leading up to the sale to MicroProse, Telecomsoft was generally a happy and creative company showing signs of becoming something much bigger. 1988 had seen a string of impressive hits, with Corruption, Fish!, Starglider 2, Carrier Command and Virus. Who knows what the company might have gone on to achieve had it been allowed to continue and publish the likes of Stunt Car Racer, Rainbow Islands and Rick Dangerous as originally intended?

This mock-up, featuring artwork by Susan Rowe, shows what Rainbow Islands might have looked like if published by Telecomsoft



Artwork © Susan Rowe





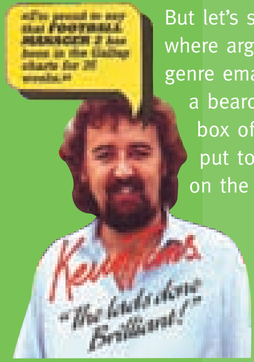
>The Beautiful Game

Forget about young boys in the park and jumpers for goalposts. A far more enduring image could be pictured indoors, with kids gathered around a computer or console, playing the latest football game. In a timely nod to Euro 2004, Simon Brew goes back to his youth and traces the virtual development of association football...

Sitting comfortably? Ready for one of those features that eulogises over how wonderful retro games are? This is not that feature. No, we're going to take a tour of yesteryear's football games, which will prove quite handsomely that game publishers have been making mugs of footie fans for some time. Fortunately, there are some shining beacons in the quagmire, and we'll get to them before it's time for lights out.

In the beginning, of course, there was Atari, and its 2600 console had numerous football titles available for it. Even the most heart-felt retro gamer would be charitable to describe them as passable, mind you. Pelé's Championship Soccer, for instance, was a three-a-side game in which you moved all your players in one block at the same time. Think the old Arsenal backline, but less sophisticated. Atari's own Real Sports Soccer was more realistic, but by the time it was released in 1983, the competition from 8-bit formats was putting it to shame. Mattel's International Soccer didn't fare much better. But nonetheless, the seeds had been sown for a genre that some 25 years later would routinely have a title in the top 10 – week in, week out.

8-bit highlights



But let's start right back in the early 80s, at the point where arguably the first significant game in the football genre emanated. We're back in 1982, and it's the tale of a bearded man who liked putting his picture on the box of his games. The man was Kevin Toms, and he put together the hugely influential Football Manager on the Addictive Games label.

At heart, Football Manager was a straightforward game. With two leagues and a limited transfer market, you could justifiably argue that time hasn't been kind to it. Yet in its day, it was hard not to get caught up in it. What differentiated it from the competition of the time – remember Champs! on the Dragon 32? – was that it bothered with graphical match highlights. It may seem silly now, but grown men were on tenterhooks watching these stickmen kick a square around. It even made up for the time it took for the league table to calculate.

Kevin Toms went on to program a few games away from the Football Manager franchise, but his beard did make the eventual return to its roots in 1988 with Football Manager 2. The long-awaited sequel featured many more management options and the match highlight graphics had been polished up. Football Manager: World Cup Edition (1990) and Football Manager 3 (1991) followed, although the latter was produced without Kevin's input. Nonetheless, his place in history was assured, with the original game appearing on every popular 8-bit platform and reportedly selling over 400,000 copes. In fact, to this day he's working on another football management game designed for online play.



The original Football Manager was something of a revelation upon release

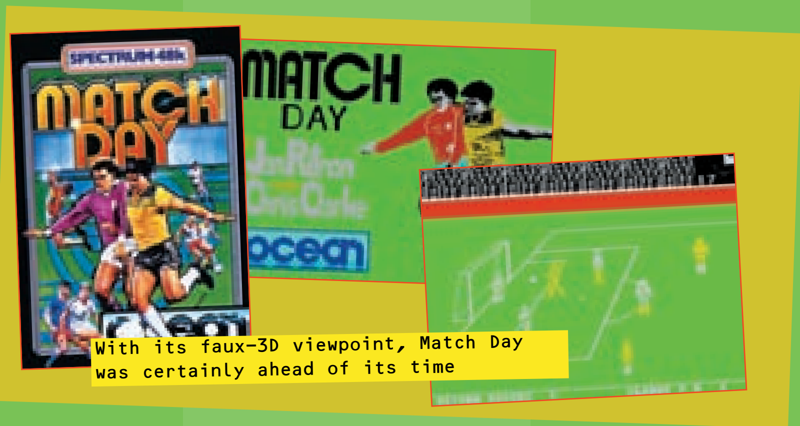


Kevin Toms and his suspect beard graced the covers of the Football Manager games

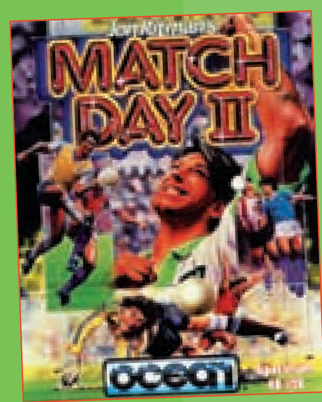
Ritman Rovers

For arguably the first defining action football game, you didn't have to wait too much longer. Jon Ritman would ultimately be famed for the classic isometric adventures Batman and Head over Heels, but his football game Match Day is still a definite highlight. First released on the Spectrum in 1985, and viewed from a side-on pseudo-3D perspective, the game featured made-up teams and the curious option to play a game in real time. It also had a forced rendition of the Match of the Day theme tune at the start, before the days when things like that would set you back lots of cash.

Whilst Match Day was unsurprisingly bereft of many of the options we now take for granted – substitutions and even formations were nowhere to be seen – it was nonetheless a considerable achievement. Not until the release of the original FIFA would another game viewed from a similar viewpoint match it, and even today, it's not an unpleasant experience to spend time in its company.



With its faux-3D viewpoint, Match Day was certainly ahead of its time



The sequel suffered from a few delays, eventually appearing in time for Christmas 1987. In the meantime, owners of souped-up Spectrum 128s could enjoy International Match Day, an enhanced version of the original game which included a World Cup competition and featured crowd noise (there was even an animated image of fans celebrating on the terraces when you found the back of the net). Match Day II was a noticeable improvement on the original, introducing a new kick meter to control the power of your shots and passes. The game also boasted the 'revolutionary' Diamond Deflection System (tm), a splendid sounding feature which allowed the ball to ricochet realistically. All 8-bit versions were similar, although the Amstrad CPC version arguably had the edge.

The 8-bit era produced dozens upon dozens of football games, many of which are best left forgotten. Unlike the situation now, there wasn't what you'd call a dominant franchise either. Despite the fact that games took a lot less time to develop, the thought of sticking the year after the game's title and banging out a mildly different version on an annual basis was alien. Perhaps that's why possibly the finest football game on the 8-bit machines only appeared once, and simply got it right first time. It also served as a beacon for an even better game many years ahead. We're talking about Microprose Soccer on the Commodore 64.

Microprose was always known as a publisher of serious games, with simulations and strategy games filling its lofty portfolio. Yet it scored big time in 1988 when it published Sensible Software's maiden football game, a tremendously entertaining title viewed from the kind of overhead perspective that Kick Off and Sensible Soccer would later make their own. Microprose Soccer introduced several features into the football cauldron. You can, for instance, trace the

evolution of aftertouch to it, whereby movements you made with the joystick immediately after the ball had left your feet affected how it swerved. Furthermore, the rain came down in Microprose Soccer, and that was ample excuse for the kind of sliding tackles that Vinnie Jones would have been proud of. Also, this was a title for C64 owners to savour. Despite being converted to other formats, the game never translated particularly well, and was always best by some way on its home format.



Sensible Software's first football game was a sure sign of the great things to come

introducing camera angles that we take for granted now as an option on the menu screen. Sadly, the game just didn't hang together particularly well.



Three worthy titles you may have passed up

Underdogs

The games we've mentioned so far are probably already familiar to you, but there are several titles dotted around that 8-bit graveyard which are worth revisiting. A nod surely needs to go in the direction of CRL for its polished, professional and engrossing management game Professional Soccer (1989). It didn't do particularly well at the time, in spite of positive reviews, and whilst it's no classic, it nonetheless deserves a closer look.

The Double (1987) was a management game that did enjoy some glory, and rightly so. The twist here was that you had to pick up the qualities of your team over time – just like in real life, y'see – and as such the game gave you no statistics by which you could make a proper value judgement as to a player's quality. Actually, that isn't quite true. Seasoned gamers quickly twigged that the salaries each of the players earned gave you all the indication you needed. Clever sods.

One positive result of the football management genre was that it kept the proverbial candle of home-grown games burning. Thus, small companies such as D&H Games and Tanglewood Software were able to slowly build up a legion of fans off the back of titles such as Football Director and Football Fever. D&H in particular took its success to the nth degree, eventually putting its games up for sale in retail outlets, and setting up a budget label called Cult, on which virtually every game was football related.

Then there was Track Suit Manager – a sorely underrated 8-bit international football management game that initially couldn't be bought in shops. It pioneered the textual commentary approach that worked so well with the Championship Manager franchise, and as it continued to receive good review scores and positive word of mouth, Goliath Games ultimately put it out at retail around the same time as Football Manager 2. It was a decision vindicated by impressive sales.

It's worth mentioning at this point a groundbreaking, if not particularly good, C64 (and also 16-bit) game called I Play: 3D Soccer (1991). This pushed the boundaries graphically,



16-bit super league

Like I Play: 3D Soccer, Kick Off graced both 8-bit and 16-bit machines in 1989, although it's the Amiga and Atari ST versions that are most fondly remembered. In fairness, 16-bit owners probably didn't know what to expect when they first picked up a copy of Kick Off. The box art was innocuous, the publisher – Anco – had just a handful of middling Commodore 64 games to its credit, and the overhead viewpoint of the screenshots didn't inspire confidence.

But what a game. Kick Off, the work of Dino Dini, introduced fast, flowing football, with the big novelty being that the ball didn't stick to your feet. It was also the first game to properly introduce referees as characters who could have an impact on the outcome of a game. Frankly, it was something of a revelation. People who didn't like football games played it, most who played football games loved it, and in multi-player mode, it was dangerously addictive. It wasn't without flaws, such as a slow, laboured lob that could easily fox the most accomplished of keepers, but Kick Off genuinely broke new ground, and gave Anco a space in the software industry, until the publisher shut its doors in 2003.

original game's AI deficiencies, and it was nigh on impossible to get a decent pass from any of your team-mates, but the concept hung together and the game worked a treat. That's in spite of a management engine best described as basic, too.

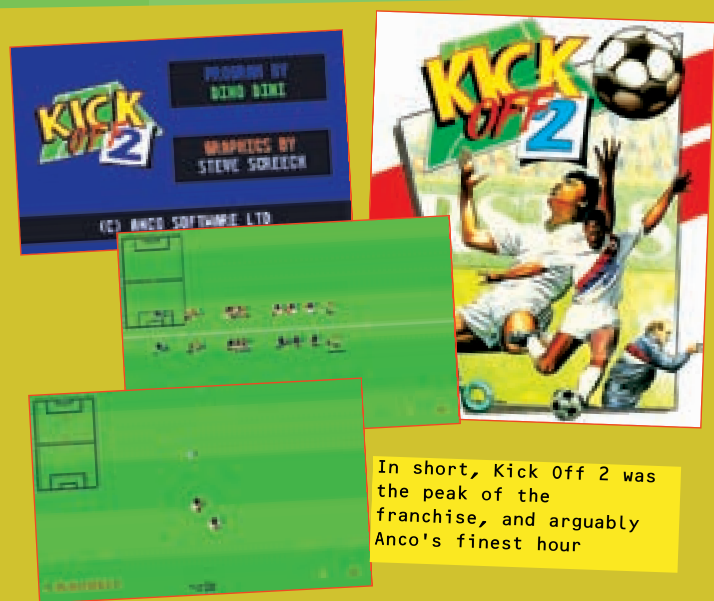
Such was the success of Player Manager that Anco took out ads in the gaming press, at one point inviting readers to submit ideas for Player Manager 2, with the lure of a free copy of the eventual game for the winners. But when Player Manager 2 did appear, several years later, Anco and Dino Dini had parted company, but not before a full-blown sequel to Kick Off had been produced.

Alive and Kicking

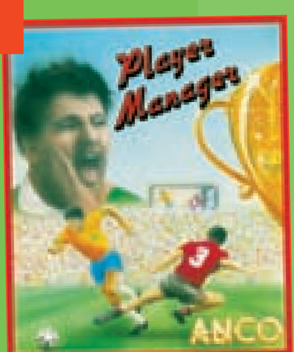
Kick Off 2 (1990) continued the franchise approach, but crucially, it was a much improved, much tighter game. It featured more tournament options, too, toughened up AI and smarter graphics. It also had its share of detractors, who argued it was so fast and zippy, it was more a game of pinball than a game of football. But that didn't seem to bother Anco, which was on the receiving end of rave reviews and huge sales. Thus, keen to capitalise on its success, it announced a range of add-on discs, most of which did make their way to market. Yet these discs did little to improve the game, and in some ways made it slightly worse. Final Whistle, for instance, introduced the offside rule into the game for the first time, but did it in a clumsy fashion. There was slightly less fluidity to the gameplay too. Then there was Winning Tactics, which – as the name suggests – simply added some tactical options and took eight quid off you in the process.



Kick Off appeared on a variety of platforms but the Amiga and ST versions were the best



In short, Kick Off 2 was the peak of the franchise, and arguably Anco's finest hour



Kick Off was also arguably the first football game to try and exploit its franchise potential. An add-on disc, Extra Time, followed, and then Dino Dini had the idea of marrying up his game to a football management engine. The result was Player Manager (1990), a game that nothing since has been able to replicate (the nearest was David O'Leary's Total Soccer on the GameBoy Advance). It cast you in the position of a young international footballer, who takes a job in the Third Division as a player manager. The idea then is that you could play as the full team, or choose to be one player on the park. And it was the latter that added something new. Effectively, you were still playing Kick Off, but you were playing it as one member of the team. Sure, it highlighted some of the

Dino Dini continued developing what was supposed to be Kick Off 3, but when he and Anco parted company, Anco took the rights to the name, and Dini took his game off to Virgin Interactive. They christened it Goal!, and it was rightly met with a lukewarm response when released in 1993. Amiga owners will no doubt fondly remember that it used to drop a frame just as the ball passed into the goal, although it was the first big football release to introduce the no backpass rule. An improved version, re-titled Dino Dini's Soccer and featuring a new four-player feature, appeared on the Megadrive the following year.

Anco wasn't deterred by the loss of Dini, though, and turned to his co-author Steve Screech to come up with the eventual Kick Off 3. The game swapped the top-down 2D perspective for an isometric viewpoint. It was not good. The series plumbed further depths with Kick Off 96, an abhorrent waste of time and money, before a partial recovery with the underrated Kick Off 97. But by that time, FIFA was marching into town. Anco focused on its Player Manager franchise, at various times endorsed by Kevin Keegan and Alex Ferguson, although

they ultimately turned it into a decent but conventional management game, far removed from the Player Manager roots.



Goal! was by all accounts Kick Off 3, although it failed to recapture the form of the glorious second game

Get Sensible

Among the fans of the Kick Off games was Sensible Software. After Microprose Soccer, it'd continued to develop some cracking games, with Mega-lo-Mania being one the finest 16-bit strategy games out there. However, it took on board the fact that Kick Off and its successors didn't give you much control over the ball, nor did it let you see much of the pitch at a time. Keen to do another football title itself, it started work on the irrepressible Sensible Soccer. Originally appearing on the Amiga and ST in 1992, the game was as instant hit and was ported quickly to the PC and Megadrive among others.

Now it's tempting at this stage to slightly glorify the game, and say that it instantly became the successor to Kick Off's throne. That's not quite true. Certainly not everyone who came over from Dino Dini's games got to grips with it immediately. However, it did earn terrific review scores and quickly shot up the charts, where it rightly stayed for a good period of time during 1992/93. And even those initial sceptics were pretty much converted once they'd invited the game into their homes for a day or two. The compromise of having the ball sticking to your feet for some of the time – depending on the skill of the player involved – worked well, and the sheer speed of the game resulted in fast, frenzied matches.

It also succeeded in a time when developers were looking at changing perspectives again. It's ironic that 8-bit football games were more successful when viewed isometrically, and yet once the gaming public migrated to more powerful machines, the less sophisticated overhead view took hold. Certainly the trend was slowly moving away from the overhead perspective. In 1991, Krisalis enjoyed some success with the admirable Manchester United Europe (all the more admirable considering its original Manchester United game was poor). Then there was Rage, which only recently went to the great software developers' graveyard in the sky. It released Striker in 1992, and quite good it was too. It continued in many guises over the following decade, right through to UEFA Striker on the Dreamcast, although the original was the best.

That's not the case with Sensible Soccer though. A 1.1 version patched some initial gameplay issues, and then the team got to work on its finest hour – Sensible World Of Soccer (1994). This added a management game to a tweaked version of the original, although it didn't allow you to take control of just one player as in Player Manager. Frankly, it was, and still is, an outstanding game. It wasn't without initial issues – how on earth could your leading striker bang in 40 goals and find his transfer value halved? But again, a freely available patch disk took care of that. A European Championship Edition followed (to tie in with Euro '96), and the series peaked with SWOS 96/97 before the best forgotten and clearly unfinished Sensible Soccer '98 ushered in a 3D graphics engine. The shift to 3D was hardly surprising, especially as the FIFA franchise was now dominating the scene. But we're coming to that shortly.



The venerable Sensible Soccer – some would say the best football game ever made

Meet the Manager

For now, we'll cycle back a few years to the Collyer brothers. They were a pair of gamers, fed up with what the lacklustre football management games on the market. Feeling they lacked detail and could be significantly improved upon, they set to work on a game of their own.

Eventually, Domark agreed to publish it, although it seemed trouble was looming. Krisalis was working on a management game of its own, and had secured endorsement from then England-boss Graham Taylor (file that one as a good idea at the time). And, to be fair, Graham Taylor's Soccer Challenge (1992) was a strong game, albeit one that relied a little too heavily on repeating the same tasks over and over again (if you didn't arrange four training sessions – for instance, your team fell apart on the pitch).

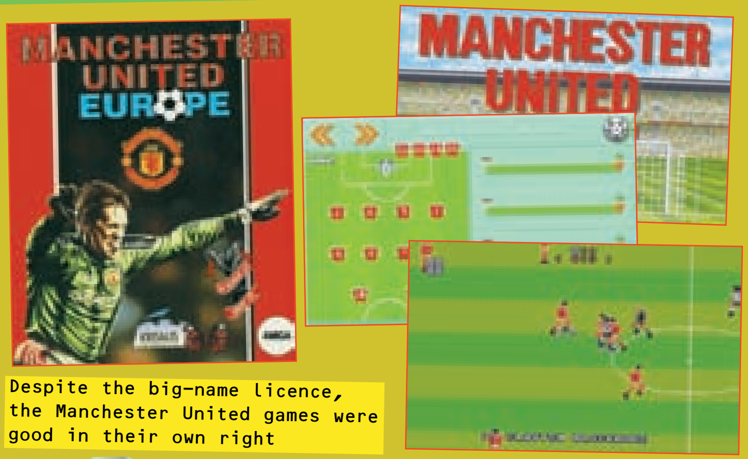


Domark, though, had Championship Manager up its sleeve, and the game was released in 1992 to… well, hardly rave reviews. Most football gamers already know the ins and outs of the CM franchise, but it's worth remembering that the original had problems. Whilst it offered shedloads more statistics and options than anything before it, it was painfully slow to play. That was primarily because it insisted on making you sit through a vide-printer of results after each game, that took several minutes to compile. Fortunately, it did well enough to warrant an update, and the subsequently released Championship Manager 93 was a solid improvement that, crucially, speeded things up properly. It established the franchise, and set a pattern for regular season updates that continues to this day.



It's worth remembering that the Amiga and ST were hardly short of quality management games. US Gold's The Manager (brought in from Germany), Gremlin's slowly-improving Premier Manager series, and the aforementioned Graham Taylor and Player Manager titles were all high performers. Yet Championship Manager set a far higher benchmark, and no game has come close to it since. Last year, the developers of the franchise finally split from Eidos, which owns the rights to the name. Thus, when looking for a title for what will effectively be the next generation of CM (Eidos itself is developing a Championship Manager 5), they dug into the archives, took one look at Kevin Toms' beard, and bought the rights to the Football Manager name. Football Manager 2005 will be published by Sega and out at the end of the year.

Before we finally get to FIFA, a few other games deserve an honourable mention. We've touched on Manchester United Europe already (did you know, by the way, that TV show Gamesmaster ran with this but wouldn't have Sensible Soccer as one of the challenges because it felt it wasn't visually strong enough?), but Krisalis also developed two further games around the Manchester United licence – Premier League Champions (1994) and The Double (1995). These get an inclusion because of the Tacti-Grid, a way of setting up your formation that didn't stick rigidly to your 4-4-2s or your 4-3-3s. Instead, it split the pitch into a grid, and you ascertained your formation by placing players into the various boxes. Sounds odd, but it worked. Also, Live Media's Total Soccer (1998) kept the overhead view flag flying. It never captured the past glories of Kick Off and Sensible Soccer, but was still reasonably playable.



Despite the big-name licence, the Manchester United games were good in their own right



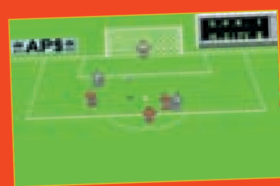
>Footballing nightmares

Meet the clinkers – the games that were so bad you can still taste them to this day. Ladies and gentlemen, it's the worst football games of all time...

World Cup Carnival (Spectrum/C64/Amstrad)

So bad, so renowned, that World Cup Carnival earns a section all to itself. We'll lump Artic's World Cup in here too, as they're pretty much the same game.

Peter Shilton's Handball Maradona (Spectrum/C64/Amstrad)



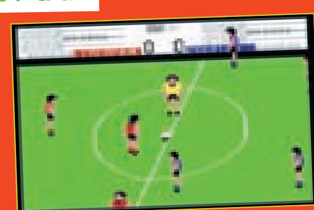
You play as the goalkeeper in this desperately tired attempt to cash in on the most infamous handball of all time. That a man of Shilts' pedigree should lend his name to this charade is all the more shameful.

Subbuteo (Spectrum/C64/Amstrad)

Ironic, given that videogames are cited as the reason Subbuteo is rarely played now. But the videogame crossover really was poor. Hasbro was going to try again at the end of the 90s, but wisely dropped the title instead.

Super Soccer (Spectrum/C64/Amstrad)

You might not remember this, but it introduced interesting features such as acceleration and slowdown times when players go on runs. But crikey, it was risible stuff.



Kick Off 96 (PC/Amiga)

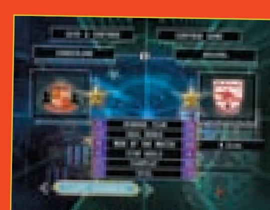
How the mighty fell – from the heady heights of the original, to the turgid lows of this in around half a decade. Ironically, Kick Off 97 was OK, but sadly, it was too little too late...

Three Lions (PlayStation)

Hurrah! The official licence to use the Three Lions, so as to generate a nice cash in for the 1998 World Cup. Boo! The game sucked big time.

Premier League Stars (PC/PlayStation)

OK, it wasn't *that* bad, but it was a blatant attempt by EA to get another game very similar to FIFA out there. The stars' concept of currency was badly implemented too, which didn't help.



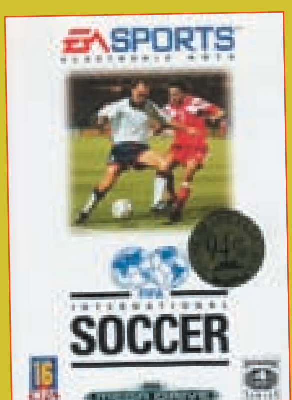
Console contenders

Consoles had given us the first football games, and in the shape of FIFA International Soccer (1993), they gave us one of the defining ones. Produced by Electronic Arts, which was nowhere near the giant it is today, it looked so much different from everything else out there. Before FIFA, Sega and Nintendo consoles had made do with the likes of Super Kick Off, rather than playing home to a distinguishing title in their own right. FIFA changed all that. Its isometric viewpoint looked the business, and whilst the game had a habit of playing too much of the football for you, it was a blast nonetheless.

FIFA gave birth to several firsts. You can trace the growth of in-game advertising to it, and you can certainly chart the birth of the annual update template for football games to FIFA's door. And then there's proper match commentary. That wasn't part of the Megadrive version, as the cartridge-based system was far too limited for such extravagances. But PCs at the time were starting to ship with these new-fangled devices called CD-ROM drives, and thus EA drafted in John Motson to deliver the lines. Motty has remained with the franchise ever since. The original game will also be remembered by many for containing a great bug that could be exploited as a cheat: whenever the ball went back to the keeper, all the opposition striker needed to do was stand in front of him; then, the attempted clearance up the field would bounce off the striker and usually end up in the goal. We never did that, though, of course. Ahem.

FIFA has been continually developed on an annual basis since its debut. However, it wasn't until FIFA 98: Road to the World Cup (1997) – the first game to ditch the Megadrive completely and appear on PC, PlayStation, Saturn, N64 and GameBoy Color – that the series really got its act together. Up until then, Gremlin's Actua Soccer (1995) for PC and PlayStation had hung together better as a rounded football game. Yet FIFA 98 finally got the marriage of fancy graphics and quality gameplay right. Sure, the inevitable World Cup 98, FIFA 99 and so on continued the work, but it was the '98 incarnation that made FIFA the fixture it is today.

Gremlin, fresh from the success of Actua Soccer, tried to emulate FIFA and the EA Sports model, yet Actua Soccer 2 (1997) was a big disappointment. By the time the improved Actua Soccer 3 (1999) arrived, it felt like too little too late. Instead, a stronger competitor was cutting in from the East.







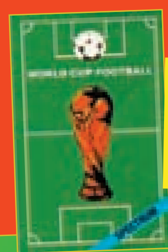
Love it or loathe it, you can't deny the huge success of the FIFA football series

>Carnival of filth

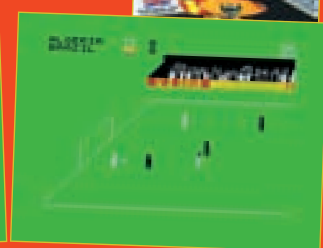
Easily the most notorious football game of the 80s was World Cup Carnival – US Gold's blatant attempt to cash in on the 1986 World Cup. The year before, the publisher confirmed that it was working on a videogame to tie into the tournament, and according to the story, it commissioned a still-unnamed team of developers to get cracking on it. In the interim, US Gold went ahead and started to put together the packaging and promotions for the title, even to the point of sending screenshots over to Zzap 64.

Then came the snag: just months before it was due to launch, US Gold realised that its commissioned game was lacking in many areas, and they needed a quick fix. Thus, they dropped the game and scoured the back catalogues in search of an old title they could touch up, and settled on Artic's risible 1984 effort, World Cup. It was a game that was sitting in the bargain bins for a quid or two by the time (and rightly so) when US Gold came across it, and the lame efforts of the publisher to right its wrongs in a matter of weeks did little to hide one of the most blatant gaming rip-offs of all time. US Gold even tried to justify the £9.95 price tag by bundling World Cup flags, posters and other 'free' goodies with the game.

A former employee of the firm anecdotally remembers going into the office the day after it went on sale, and seeing the lights on the switchboard permanently on. Letters to magazines of the time were vicious, citing not only correspondents' disgust with the game (which still had a 1984 copyright within it!), but also outrage at the way US Gold were handling the complaints. Even four years later, when the firm released Italy 1990, the reviews were still talking about the outright disaster of World Cup Carnival.

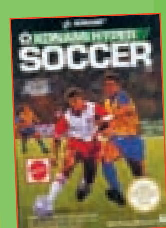



The similarity is eerie isn't it? US Gold couldn't even be bothered to draw proper goals

Big in Japan

The history of the International Superstar Soccer (ISS) series can be traced back to Konami Hyper Soccer, the Japanese developer's first ever football game. Released in 1991 for the NES, it introduced the fluid passing game that would characterise the ISS series. Three years later, the first proper ISS game appeared on the SNES. A straight port of the Japanese Perfect Eleven game, ISS benefited from the greater visual prowess of the SNES, delivering sharp graphics and smooth player animation. But the emphasis was clearly on gameplay, and in particular the passing game. That's right – proper football! In fact, the original ISS redefined the radar system, so you always knew exactly where your team-mates were on the pitch.



The tweaked ISS Deluxe followed in 1994, and this was ported to the Megadrive in '96 (complete with an eight-player mode). The game was ported to the PlayStation in '97, and the first fully 3D version, ISS 64, appeared on the Nintendo 64 in the same year. This was ported to the PlayStation as ISS Pro, and yearly updates have followed since, with each one fine-tuning the trademark passing game. The defining ISS Pro

Evolution appeared on the PlayStation in 2000, and then the series split in two, with next-gen consoles receiving both ISS and Pro Evolution Soccer games. It's the latter, created by Konami Tokyo, that has gone on to seriously challenge the efforts of EA Sports.



ISS through the ages. The visuals have improved, but the first-class gameplay remains intact

Title Race

Now, we've come down in the action stakes to an annual two-way battle between Pro Evolution Soccer and FIFA. Contenders come and go – David Beckham Soccer, the This Is Football franchise, UEFA Champions League and Red Card Soccer to name but a few – yet the market is harder to crack than ever. Football games are big business now, and it's sometimes easy to forget that heavyweight franchises like Championship Manager were started by two brothers working from home. Given the incredible number of people behind the latest games, a new contender emerging from the bedrooms of Britain is simply inconceivable. Put simply, the game has changed, and that's a crying shame.

Whilst there's a reasonable argument that the games we have today are the best the genre has produced – certainly Pro Evolution Soccer 3 and Championship Manager 4 have few, if any equals – what's seemingly lost forever is that spark. In the 80s, an exciting new football game was seemingly always around the corner, and you didn't need a big licence, the rights to use players' names, or a mass development house to jump on the gravy train.

So as Euro 2004 plays out, and your instant urge is to fire up your PC or console and load up one of the latest games, why not treat yourself to some old-skool action? Dig into the archives and spend some time with the football games you used to love. The likes of Match Day, Microprose Soccer, Track Suit Manager and Kick Off will be pleased to see you.

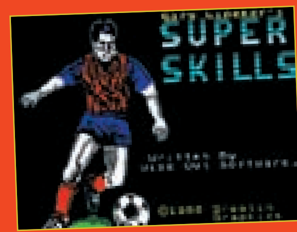


>Ugly mugs

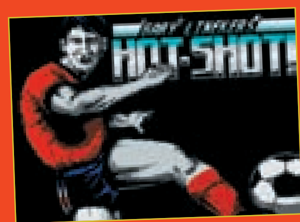
Many footballers have licensed their names to be used in games, presumably seeing them laughing all the way to the bank. We guess they weren't laughing so hard when they saw their actual image in the game. Take a look at these loading screen shockers...



More like Freddy Mercury Soccer Manager



A poor attempt. This could be just about any footballer



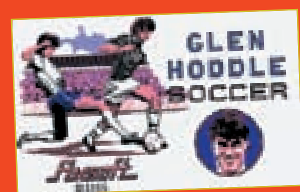
Gary's back, again with blue hair – and wearing a lifejacket



Cheer up Gary – why the long face?



Gazza looks pretty good here, in his Spurs strip



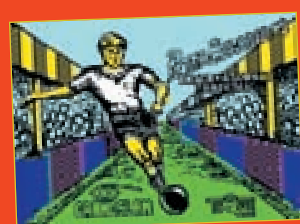
A classic. They haven't even spelt his name correctly!



Cloughy doesn't fare too badly here, in typical shouty pose



Kenny Dalglish joins the ranks of Faceache FC



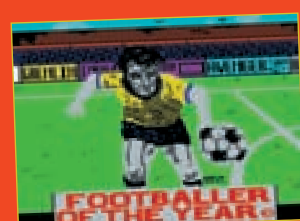
The Spectrum couldn't produce brown, so Beardsley gets yellow hair



That's surely not Shilton and Maradona? Where's the hand of God?



It may not be a football game, but Jack's quite the lad here



OK, not a licence. But surely that's no other than Lou Macari?

The Retro Gamer Eleven

Here's our pick of the best football titles released between the birth of gaming and the PlayStation era. Crucially, not only has each of these games had an ongoing influence in its respective niche of the genre, but you'd be hard pushed to complain if you sat in front of one of them now with a few hours to kill...



Dino-bites

We tracked down Kick Off developer Dino Dini to talk about his glorious gaming history – and the small matter of Sensible Soccer...



RG: Did any particular football game have an influence on Kick Off?

DD: I did not play other football games, so no other football games had an influence.

RG: Why do you feel Kick Off worked so well? Was it a straightforward case of gameplay over graphics?



DD: I would not say "over graphics". I mean, better graphics would not have hurt. But at the end of the day, it was the quality of the gameplay.

RG: Were you happy tweaking and improving Kick Off, with add-on disks and sequels, or was there pressure from Anco to turn the game into a franchise?



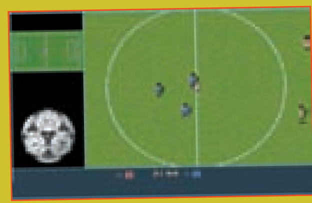
DD: It already was a franchise, and Anco exploited it in all manner of ways for which I got no reward. I wanted to create a new game that improved upon Kick Off by adding more depth and removing some of the shortcoming of the original game. This eventually became Goal!

RG: What are your opinions on Sensible Soccer? Did you feel slightly aggrieved when you first saw it, or did you take it as a compliment?



DD: I was annoyed because the developer had already had its share of success in other well made products, and it decided to invade my patch. I took it as both a compliment and a kick in the teeth. It undermined my plan to move football gaming on to the next level. In undermining my efforts, Sensible Soccer perhaps allowed FIFA to take hold. The lack of football games with real playability today can perhaps be blamed in part upon this. Of course had I got Goal! out before Sensible Soccer, things might well be very different now. But we learn from our mistakes, although my biggest mistake has always been to take things too seriously.

RG: When developing Goal!, did you set out to try and surpass Sensible Soccer?



DD: No, because Sensible Soccer was already inferior to Kick Off. The success it had was due to the fact that, as a simplified game, it appealed to those who had never got to grips with Kick Off. What I did attempt to do with Goal! was create a game with a better learning curve so that fewer people would stumble at the first hurdle. Sensible Software had a head start in learning from what I had done – in doing Kick Off I had to start completely from scratch. This is why I say that, in this sense, I am also the father of Sensible Soccer.

RG: How did programming the Atari ST compare to the Amiga? Did you have to make any compromises when porting your games?

DD: The Amiga was much more powerful than the ST, but Kick Off was originally written for ST, and then ported to Amiga.

RG: Goal! was released on the Megadrive as Dino Dini's Soccer. How easy was it to covert the game to a console?

DD: There were several challenges, but the result was excellent. The core engine was converted in seven weeks; the rest of the development time was spent dealing with the front end, which was a real pain.

RG: Did you feel like a superstar seeing your name above the title?

DD: No, but it felt good to have my name on something as concrete as that.

RG: What are your opinions of the Kick Off and Player Manager sequels that have appeared since you parted company with Anco?

DD: I have not played any of them. From what I hear they are by and large terrible.

RG: Do you play any of the recent football games like FIFA and Pro Evolution Soccer?

DD: Yes, for research purposes, not because I enjoy them.

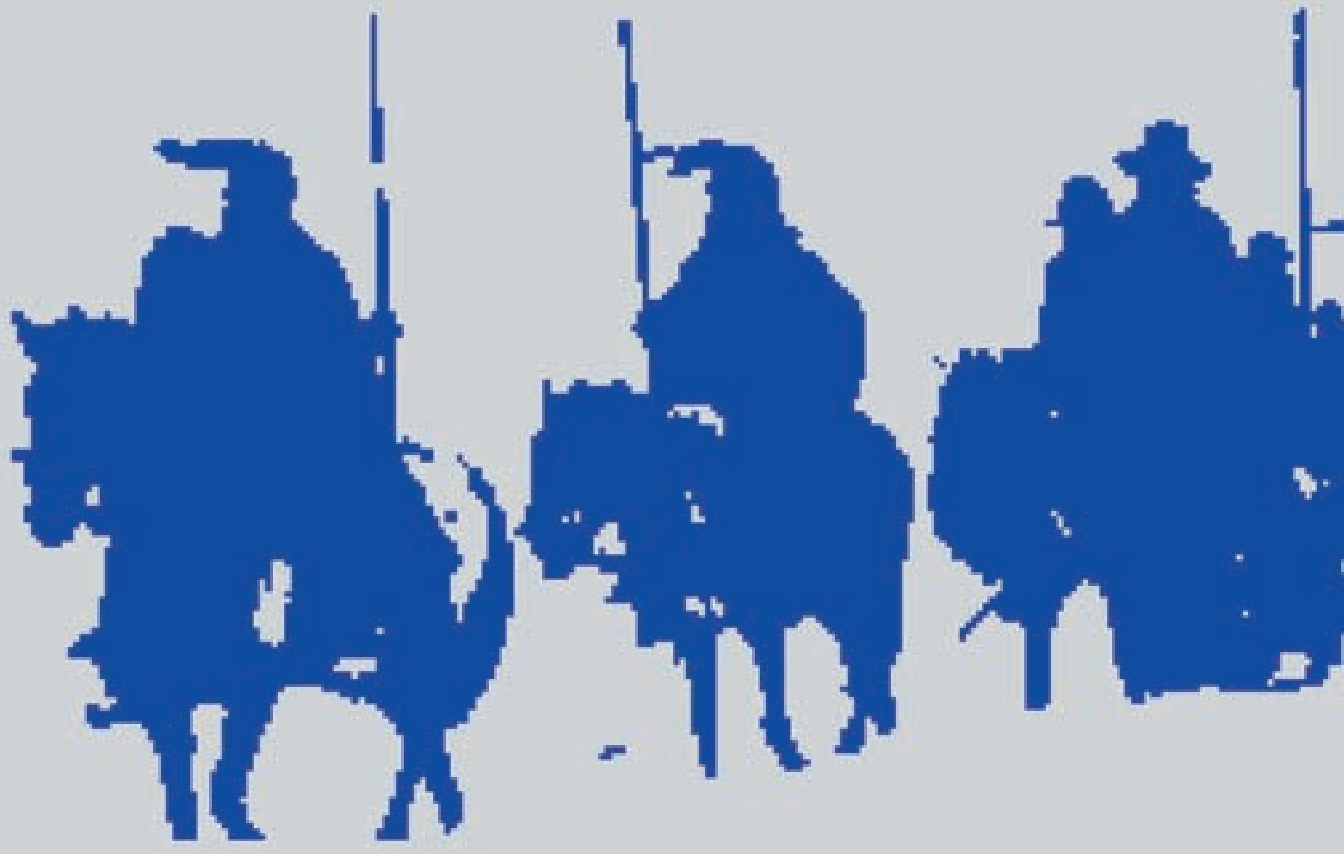
RG: Right, so you're working on a football game at the moment?

DD: Yes, but it is all secret.

RG: Finally, the inevitable football question. Which national team do you support, and who do you think will win Euro 2004?

DD: I support Italy and England, depending on my mood. If I am in the mood for a horror-suspense I watch Italy. If I am in the mood for a comedy-farce, I watch England. I think Italy will win, but I will be just as happy if England do. RG*

eMag





>House of Lords

Lords of Midnight was released to critical acclaim in August 1984, 20 years ago. In the first of a two-part feature, Chris Wild chronicles the original game and its sequels, and talks to Mike Singleton, the trilogy's esteemed author...

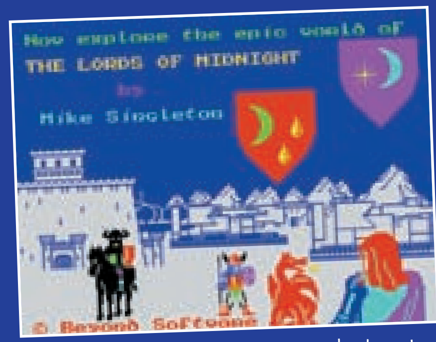
"Welcome to the world's first-ever Epic game," begins the manual to Lords of Midnight, Mike Singleton's 8-bit classic. The author was keen to point out that this wasn't simply an adventure or a war game, but a new type of game that could only be described as 'epic'. Indeed, the term 'game' could only be used loosely: "It more closely resembles a fantasy film than a computer game, but the main difference is that you are in control of the main characters and whether you lead them to victory or defeat, the story is written around your exploits. The game sets the scene, controls the forces of evil and independent characters which move in and out of the plot, and draws the landscape of Midnight and its people in a way never before seen in any computer game." As Luxor of the Free, the player was invited to write a new chapter in the history of Midnight, while the game itself left an indelible mark on the history of gaming. Lords of Midnight really was revolutionary for its time.

Lords of Midnight



Lords of Midnight was conceived in September 1983, when Terry Pratt organised a meeting with Mike. "He was in the process of setting up Beyond Software for EMAP," remembers Mike, "and was keen for me to write a game for them. I talked about three different possibilities, one of which involved the idea of landscaping – I really can't remember what the other two ideas were. Anyway, the landscaping idea interested Terry the most, but it was still very much at the idea stage. The outcome of our discussion was that I would first implement the technique and then, providing it worked, we'd go ahead with the full game – which I wanted to call the Lords of Atlantis. Fortunately for everyone, Terry wasn't particularly fond of the title and asked me to think of something else. After a month or so of experimentation – I seem to remember I began by drawing pyramids in BASIC – I had enough to show as a proof of concept and I signed a contract with Beyond. And thus Lords of Midnight was born."

Singleton created a technique that would display his game compellingly and originally. Adventure games of that era displayed the odd static image, which took a few seconds to draw, along with a textual description of what the character could see. Mike's technique gave the player a full 360-degree panoramic view that changed as things altered on the horizon. The functional graphics were an integral part of the game and the accompanying text provided the player with additional details. For example, you knew there was an army before you as you could see it through Luxor's eyes, and the text would confirm how many soldiers that army consisted of. Mike called the technique 'Landscaping'. As for the blue-on-white colour scheme, this came about when Mike was designing graphics to overcome the colour-handling limitations of the Spectrum. Blue and white worked well together, and the idea of a world covered with ice followed.



The landscaping and panorama technique demanded a grid-based, terrain-driven map rather than the usual location-based adventures of the time. Thus, Mike drew up his map and started inventing the world in which his game would take place. The previous year's biggest adventure game, The Hobbit, comprised 80 locations; Lords of Midnight had no less than 3,904. The Hobbit, along with most, if not all, adventures of that era, allowed you to control just one character; Lords gave you control of up to 32.

Myth making

Lords of Midnight shipped with a 30-page novella that had a hand-drawn map on the back. Inside was a keyboard overlay to help the player with the one-key control method. The story and game plot were well written, if not particularly original, as Tolkien's Lord of the Rings was an obvious influence.

The story sees Doomdark the Witchking, a fallen counsellor of the Wise, draw power from the icy cold and use it to increase his hold over Midnight, a land ravaged by winter for thousands of years. Having conquered much of the northern territories, he unleashes his hordes on the remaining strongholds of southern Midnight during the deepest part of the winter, the solstice. He draws on the power of the magical artefact, the Ice Crown – fashioned from the purest, coldest crystals of ice and forged in the frozen wastes on the bleakest nights by Doomdark himself – to increase the mystical Ice Fear that grips the world.

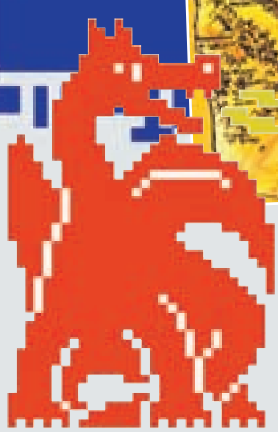
Luxor of the Free discovers that he is the one true King, the last heir of the House of the Moon. By harnessing the power of the Moon Ring, given to him by Rorthron the Wise, he has the Power of Command and Vision. Luxor must attempt



That's right – over 32,000 views!



The map provided with the original Lords of Midnight



to unite the Lords of Midnight and take them into battle against Doomdark. To help with the near-impossible task, Luxor's son Morkin journeys north to seek out and destroy the Ice Crown. Thus, the War of the Solstice begins.

The story borrowed heavily from Lord of the Rings and there were many similarities in characters, landscape, and plot lines. It certainly wasn't coincidence – in fact, two years earlier Mike released the game Shadowfax, in which you played Gandalf riding his trusty steed against the Black Riders, and in 1989 he would go on to write War in Middle Earth, an official strategic war game for Melbourne House. It's safe to say that Mike had a desire to work with Tolkien material.

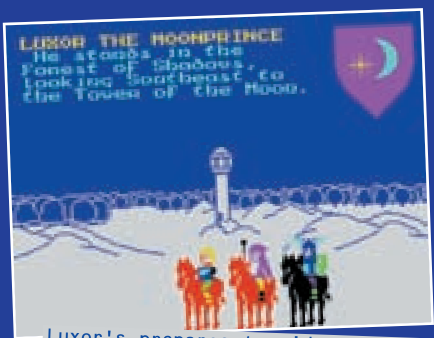
The fact that the story is typical fantasy fare matters little. For its time, Lords of Midnight was both beautifully crafted and thoroughly gripping, immersing the player in an extensive world with a complete history. Wayne Britcliffe, artist on War of the Solstice, a PC remake of Lords of Midnight, agrees: "I think the strongest draw is that Midnight, Icemark and all the characters were so strongly realised that they live on beyond playing the actual games themselves. All the great fictional places and characters of literature, films or games, at least where I'm concerned, do this. Midnight is no exception. Even when actually playing the games your imagination takes you beyond, especially in the case of the original's 8-bit limitations. I imagined swords clashing, men screaming, the plains filling with marauding enemy armies, and smoke rising in the distance as snow falls."

>Race for the prize

In a clever move, Lords of Midnight allowed you to print out every page of information while you were playing. Beyond used this for a competition, by offering to turn the campaign of the first person to complete the game into a novel – providing you sent in the printouts of course. "It ultimately depended on finding a book publisher who would run with the idea," commented Singleton. "Beyond, I know, tried hard to get a publisher interested – at one stage, Roger Kean and Oliver Frey, the guys who set up Crash magazine, were very nearly recruited to turn it into a graphic novel. But in the end, no willing publisher was found. The first person to complete the game had actually sent in his roll of thermal paper within about two weeks of the game hitting the shelves, which amazed us all – especially me. It had taken me nine solid hours to test the game to victory and I had the complete map and all the inside information to help me. I know Beyond gave him some sort of other prize but I really can't remember what that was."

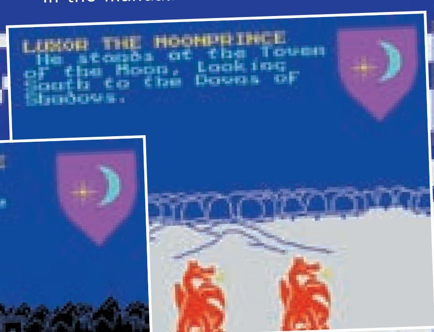
Forging ahead

Lords of Midnight was an epic undertaking, huge in scope and technique. Despite being designed and written by one person in under six months, the coding was extremely tight and very well tested. There have only been a handful of bugs found to date. "There would have been some seven months between my first meeting with Terry Pratt and the final master copy of the game," says Mike, "but in actual flat-out work, I would say it was actually somewhere between four and five months of full-time effort, including writing the story and manual."



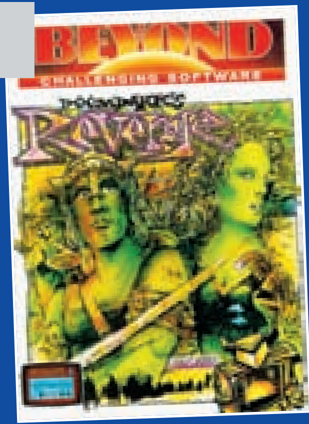
Luxor's prepares to ride into battle

By the end of the project there was very little of the Spectrum's memory left, at least not enough to do anything with. In order to save memory, Mike removed the bottom three rows of the map, which saved him a whopping 384 bytes, because each location required 2 bytes. That would only just store the paragraph you've just read, but it was a huge amount to Mike. Towards the end of the project, memory became such a problem that it was streamlined four times to make it fit and even then a few features were still lost in the process. The manual states: "The Utarg of Utarg may be persuaded to bring the Targ into the war against Doomdark, especially if the armies of the Witchking are tempted or forced to trespass on his lands. If the Ice Fear grows too strong, however, he may lend his loyalty to Doomdark." Sadly, deadlines and memory restrictions meant the feature was nothing more than an item in the manual.





Doomdark's Revenge

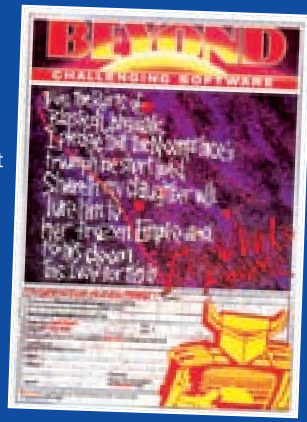


February 1985 saw the release of the second part of the saga, Doomdark's Revenge, on the Spectrum (as with Lords, versions were also released for the Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC). The game used the same visual techniques as the original but the design was rationalised to allow greater scope. With the game engine in place, Mike obviously had a head start. Still, despite a complete new back story, new graphics, new game mechanics, and the required changes to the engine, the game was finished in less than six months.

Doomdark's Revenge was set in the Frozen Empire, north-east of Midnight's Icy Wastes. Shareth the Heartstealer, desperate for revenge for the defeat of her father Doomdark, kidnaps Morkin and takes him into the Icemark. Luxor must travel north to find his son and crush a possible uprising within the Frozen Empire.

In light of the memory problems at the end of Lords, Mike had to make a number of programming refinements to cram the new game into the Spectrum's 48Kb RAM. The map was now 64x96 screens, resulting in a staggering 6,144 locations. This alone would take 12Kb, so the engine was optimised, making each location just 1 byte. In this way, the bigger map was stored in less memory. Lords had 32 characters, each taking up 32 bytes, whereas Revenge needed 128 characters, but Mike managed to store each in just 15 bytes. Many changes like this had to be made for the game to fit.

Although written with almost the same game engine, Revenge felt like a very different game, and wasn't necessarily better for it. The artificial intelligence in Lords was simplistic – to some extent the game played on a set of rails. A large number of armies were set to stream down the map, visiting strongholds in an almost predefined manner, before finally making an assault on the Citadel of Xajorkith. Although this often led to a very similar game experience every time, it did help the game fit within the storyline. In Revenge everything was less predetermined, which in turn made the game seem much more random.



"I bought Doomdark's Revenge but the same wonder was never there," says Gaz Bell, author of Psion Midnight, a handheld version of Lords. "Maybe it's because there was no need to draw a map and discover the world as the lords usually found you one way or another. I did play it a lot and the first victory was sweet if somewhat unexpected, but the whole game was just too big and too random, and well-thought out strategies didn't really pay off like they did in Lords. In the end I went back to the original."

Second nature

Mike seemed to lavish more attention on Lords, and this was probably due to new time pressures. The map in Lords was hand drawn with every place and character individually named. In Revenge, Mike used a generating program, tweaking the seed numbers until he found a map he liked. The code that generated much of the map content and the names in the game was required to keep the memory usage down. This technique was the start of the fractal generation later used in his 16-bit games. The name generator made all the characters very similar, robbing them of personalities. They never felt like they had the history of the previous game's characters and the rationalisation of the language made the descriptions less colourful.

To be fair, Revenge also introduced a number of new elements, such as magical items, a female character, tunnels, mist, lieges and foes, character traits, and NPCs with a purpose. Problems aside, the game



The map to Icemark, the Frozen Empire





The sequel featured improved graphics

was still very good. As a sequel, it was more Jaws 2 than Speed 2.

Looking back, Mike himself prefers the original. "With 20/20 hindsight, the way the characters in Doomdark's Revenge made and broke alliances of their own accord, and moved about the map on their own quests, made things too unpredictable for the sort of strategic planning a player could do in Lords. Perhaps some better feedback – in the form of news or intelligence information – to the player on what was actually going on in the (largely unseen) background between the other characters would have made this feature really work. At the time of release, though, I was convinced that Revenge was a significant improvement over the original."

Eye of the Moon

Just like Tolkien, Mike planned his story as a trilogy and Eye of the Moon was to be the final chapter. The game was always intended for release; it was even mentioned in the very first game as the story of Morkin's search for a magical jewel that he could use to look into the future.

The story is set some years on from the events of the first two games, in the lands south-west of Midnight. Luxor is dying and wants to see what is going to happen to Midnight after his death. So that Luxor can rest in peace, Morkin goes in search of the magical jewel, the Eye of the Moon, which enables people to see into the future.

After Lords and Revenge, Mike became very busy on numerous projects, so Eye became partly a hobby for him. He rewrote his graphics routines to enable full-colour graphics in the landscape panoramas – green trees, golden castles, red roofs – that didn't suffer from the Spectrum's dreaded colour clash. To achieve this, the engine would add extra black shading dynamically to the scenery graphics to mask any clash, a process that Mike would later premier in Dark Sceptre. The scenery graphics were runtime modifiable, allowing the engine to draw various versions based on the same graphics. For example, all the castles in the game would be unique – Mike would be able to specify the number of towers, shape of the tower, shape of the tower roof, colour of the tower roof, number of walls etc. Similar principles would be applied to all the scenery graphics allowing for more varied landscapes. Each character in the game would have a unique large-scale face generated by a similar identikit-style process.

> "The third part of the trilogy, possibly the most exciting yet, is still to come, when Mike will send Morkin down to the warmer lands which lie below Midnight itself, to find The Eye of the Moon."
> – The manual to Doomdark's Revenge teases the reader with talk of the third game



The game's map would be four times larger than Lords, mainly generated rather than stored using an advanced version of Revenge's compression techniques. Mike also wrote a new name generator that provided more convincing names.

To prevent the vastness of the game hurting game play, the map was split into 12 realms and the player would have to complete quests in each kingdom before moving on. Although there would be more characters, the player would be able to take control of a commander and have characters follow his lead. The quest for the Eye of the Moon would make up the main thread of the game and it would have been unlikely to have had any military campaigns, apart from dealing with an enemy hindering the player's progress.

During one interview, Mike even hinted that he had been playing with linking two Spectrums together through the ear and mic ports, allowing for multiplayer games. "I did try it. And I made it work," says Mike, "but there were certain limitations that meant it wasn't very useable. The ear-mic socket connection was absolutely full of noise, so I had to do a ridiculous amount of handshaking, re-transmitting, and re-receiving to exchange correct data. The actual rate was something like two characters per second – a magnificent 16bps compared to the 5,600bps of a slow modem.

"This rather restricted the sort of game you could apply it to. I suppose it could actually have worked with the Lords model, which isn't particularly data heavy. I did actually use it in a game I wrote for C&VG. This was a mixture of a board game (the board was the centre-spread of the magazine) and a computer game about spies and spying. The Spectrum kept track of who was really who and who knew what about what. Normally, in a two-player game with one Spectrum, only one person was allowed to look at the computer screen at a time and would have a password to enable his display. But the facility to link two spectrums with the tape leads was there and you could each watch your own screen, with the two machines talking to each other – very slowly."

The third eye

Mike was working on Quake Minus One for the C64 and planned to start Eye after its release. However, by the time Quake Minus One shipped, Beyond was in the process of being bought out by Telecomsoft. Mike started work on its Star Trek licence, and then Dark Sceptre, so Eye of the Moon slipped into the shadows of history. Some of his later games, such as Midwinter, Flames of Freedom and Ashes of Empire, no doubt used many of the ideas that he was planning for Eye.

"Quake Minus One was a joint project with a friend of mine," Mike recalls. "Originally I was going to do mostly design and just a little programming but the project turned out to need more programming on my side than I'd anticipated. This in turn meant I had less time to devote to Eye of the Moon. By the time Quake Minus One was finished, Beyond had changed hands and was part of Telecomsoft. The new management wanted to change the terms of the agreement for Eye of the Moon – same advance fee but two versions instead of one. Since this was originally a gentleman's agreement rather than a written contract, it was a question of take it or leave it. Feeling somewhat aggrieved at the proposed change, I decided to leave it. I always intended to find another publisher, but setting up Maelstrom Games and getting more and more heavily involved in its projects kept pushing Eye into the background.

"I'm afraid there's now fundamentally zero Eye of the Moon material in my possession. If screenshots were ever published (and I honestly can't remember if they were), they must have been mock-ups of what was intended, because I was still working on the rendering code when Telecomsoft and I parted company on the project. I do emember making some mock-ups, so maybe screenshots do exist."

Speaking in tongues

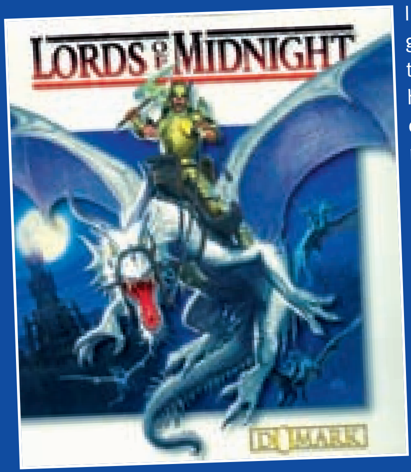
Fredrik Ekman, author of the article "Ancient Tongue of the Wise", talks about Lord of the Rings as a major source of inspiration for Singleton, and reveals that The Citadel novelette contains an intriguing introduction. "Tolkien's influence is particularly obvious in the first game in the series, but can be clearly seen throughout the three games. In Tolkien's case, the driving motivation was the love of language. He just wanted to find out who were speaking the languages he invented, and thus he came to develop one of the most influential literary worlds ever. For Singleton it was different. He did not start with the languages. In fact, most names of places and persons from the first two games are all too typical of the sort of thing you will find in most hack fantasy novels. There appears to be little or no conscious thought of phonology, morphology or etymology, or any of the other 'ologies' which form the linguistic science.

"Therefore it is all the more surprising and fascinating to find, in the novelette introduction to the third game, The Citadel, a few phrases of what appears to be a constructed language, the ancient tongue of the Wise. Not only is there a constructed language, but it seems to be elaborated at least to the level of being a fairly complex sketch, complete with some simple grammar rules and a vocabulary of some 20 words. Either that, or Singleton did a brilliant job of fooling me."





Lords of Midnight 3: The Citadel



In 1993, Mike was finely given the chance by Domark to work on the final part of his trilogy. "Domark had contacted me about releasing a retro pack with (amongst others) Lords of Midnight and Doomdark's Revenge. This was duly published and this in turn led to Maelstrom and Domark talking about doing a new Lords of Midnight game."

For some reason, the new PC game wasn't to be Eye of the Moon. It was to take place in the Blood March, south-east from Midnight, and therefore to the east of where Eye would have taken place. In the game, Morkin must enter the Blood March to rescue his father and defeat Boroth the Wolfheart. But despite these changes to the story, Mike still introduced the game as part three of the trilogy in The Citadel's manual: "...I had always planned to write part III of the saga, but changes of publisher, demand for other projects, and new technology conspired against this for many years. Finally, with the advent of 32-bit processing power on the PC, with a highly skilled team at Maelstrom already deep into 3D technology, and with the enthusiasm of Domark fizzing over, the time seemed ripe for part III of Lords of Midnight, The Citadel. Now we could have real-time 3D action, we could deepen the personalities and relationships of the characters, we could have full sound and music, we could... it was irresistible."

So maybe Mike had finally abandoned the original concept, or Eye had turned into The Citadel, or more likely, Midnight had turned it into a trilogy in four parts. "Largely, it was a good way of keeping personal intellectual property rights open on Eye of the Moon, the real part III of the trilogy in my own mind. The Citadel was exclusive to the publisher for two years after publication and, of course, Maelstrom was involved in the rights to it as well. But I also felt there was room in the Lords of Midnight world for an in-between storyline. I had actually talked to Beyond (when it was still owned by EMAP) about extending the series to seven games (Eye of the Moon plus four subsequent episodes), which they were very happy with. All this fell through when Beyond changed hands, but the idea of more than three in the series wasn't completely new."

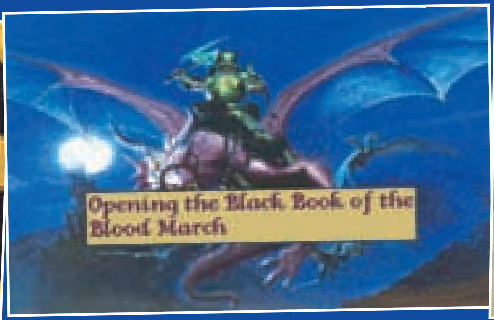
The Citadel took place in a timeline 20 years after Morkin's kidnap by Shareth. It seems Eye would take place later than that. Still, The Citadel does have a few interesting links to Eye, as Mike explains: "When we were developing The Citadel, I still had a printed list of all the place names that my Eye name generator had created, so quite a few of these made their way into the game (hand-selected). Likewise, the Blood March and the names of the 12 kingdoms were taken straight from what I had planned for Eye. Of course this meant I would have to start afresh with Eye when the time came, but that seemed a distant prospect at the time."

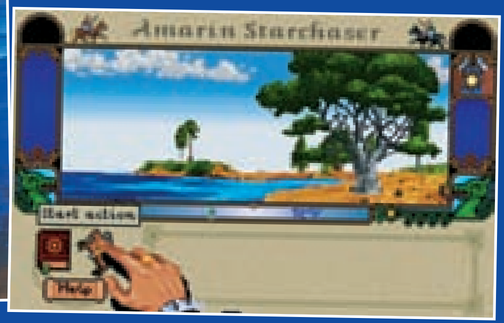
In fact, there's a high probability that The Citadel borrowed a lot more from the Eye than just names. The opening chapter of the novella shipped with the game tells of Luxor travelling to the Blood March to get the Eye of the Moon back from the King's Tower in Coromand. Luxor is old and would like to use the jewel, as well as returning it to its rightful place. Up until the point that Luxor makes the Journey to the Blood March, the story could well have been the opening for Eye. Sounds plausible, but Mike disagrees. "The Eye of the Moon story hadn't even been started. But lots of people knew about the intended part III and I did still intend to do Eye later on. So the first chapter was designed to keep the Eye of the Moon theme alive as well as to lead the way into this





The third game was released on the PC in 1995





new interlude. And the Citadel story as a whole really builds up the baleful power of the Eye of the Moon, in preparation for that game. Or so the thinking went."

Problem child

The Citadel was beset with problems before it had even left the drawing board. Domark started to publicise The Citadel early, with adverts appearing in the specialist press. Midnight fans were excited – a new Midnight game was in the works. Would it be the infamous Eye of the Moon? Then the adverts dried up and everyone started to wonder where the game had gone.

The main programmer left the project after a year. This is always a problem in development, as new programmers generally don't like picking up the pieces left by another. This still holds true, even though most code is now written in high-level languages like C or C++. The Citadel, however, was 100% assembler. It would be another 18 months before the project was finished with a new coder at the helm. However, none of the original code was rewritten, which led to continuity problems and bugs. The project was probably overly ambitious for the allotted timescale and number of developers. Mike had many ideas about how the third part of the series should be developed, but developing a 3D game in 1995 for the PC was a much bigger task than writing the originals.

As before, Mike wrote all the stories, drew all the maps, designed the artificial intelligence, and even managed to do some 3D model animation. As much as he wanted to, he was never able to program the whole game. Running Maelstrom and its other projects, like the Ring Cycle for Psygnosis, was just too time consuming. But in a link to his pioneering debut in the series, Mike did manage to write the original version of the 3D landscaping engine.

The game was released a year late and although the relationship between developer and publisher had initially been good, by the end it had badly deteriorated. Lords of Midnight 3: The Citadel, slipped out to an unsuspecting world. The press didn't like it, PC gamers didn't like it, and worst of all, the Midnight fans didn't like it. "I wasn't completely satisfied with it but I wasn't totally unhappy with it either," says Mike. "Another six months work on it could have made it a lot better but, at the time, that wasn't feasible. In the event, both the interiors and the exteriors ended up very much more sparsely populated by characters, creatures and objects than we had originally intended, and consequently opportunities for real player interaction were diminished."

Time waits for no one

The game had many bugs and needed patching almost immediately. It was a DOS product and didn't work well with the newly emerging Windows 95. Even now, the game doesn't work particularly well with any version of Windows, which prevents it being revisited and enjoyed for what it was.

Lords of Midnight and Doomdark's Revenge were technically









Despite the flawed gameplay, The Citadel looked great

excellent. Firstly, there was the revolutionary landscaping technique that afforded the player a level of realism never before experienced. It's hard to appreciate that now, but back in 1984 Lords of Midnight really was breath taking. Secondly, Mike managed to cram the games into a small amount of memory, achieving so much with so little code. In comparison, The Citadel failed technically. The new 3D voxel landscaping technique may have been relatively new during the design phase, but by the time the game hit the shelves, it was old hat and rather plain looking.

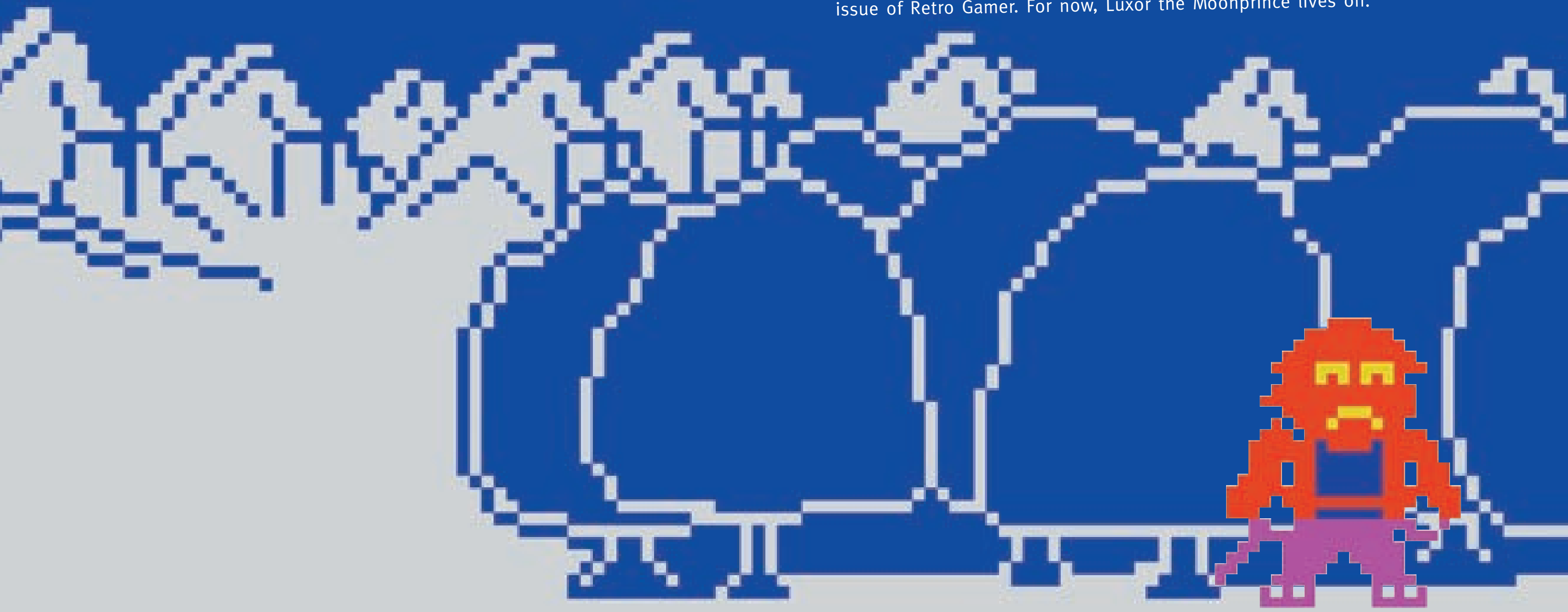
A major achievement with Lords of Midnight was its simplicity. The game was easy to understand and easy to play; the interface was a marvel. Being turn based it gave you the leisure to think through what you were about to do – a bit like playing chess on the open battlefield. The Citadel tried to be too complex. During key moments of the game you were forced to take real-time control of your lords, actually fighting a one-on-one battle with them, moving them over dull landscapes to touch other moving lords in an attempt to communicate with them. You even had to suffer watching your lords travel long distances and wait for something to happen that warranted an intercept.

Plainly and simply, The Citadel suffered from evolution. Mike had been heading to this point since the moment he started coding Doomdark's Revenge. Midwinter, Flames of Freedom, and Ashes of Empire, all previewed many of the techniques used in The Citadel and in the context of these games, they work. However, with a Midnight game, the Midnight community were expecting something more like the original games. Although it replaced the keyboard overlay with a nice icon-driven interface, and the landscaping technique was improved, in hi-res and hi-colour, fans of the series wanted a strategy adventure, not a third-person fighting game.

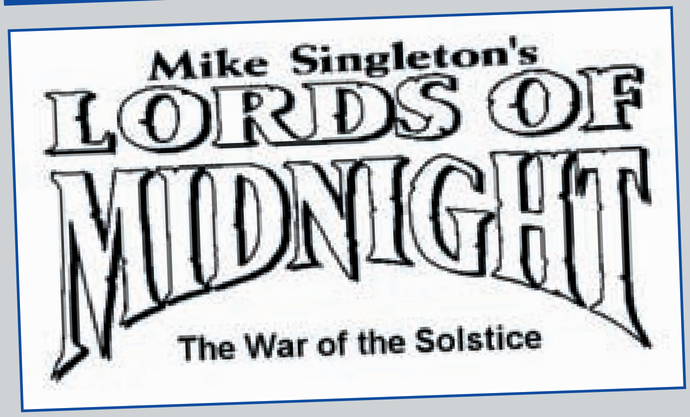
It's interesting that Mike would later tell Andrew Leonard in an interview that reviews for the original games always praised their immersive qualities: "Immersion can be many things. The degree of perceived immersion was very great, despite the fact that the graphics were chunky, the soundtrack was often nonexistent, and [in some cases] there was absolutely zero real-time animation. Immersion does not necessarily require photo-realistic rendering at 60 frames per second and Dolby Surround sound." Yet with The Citadel he appeared to be striving for these things and veering away from the immersion-led originals.

The eye reopens

Mike is currently in Switzerland, working on a multiplayer online RPG for Komodo Entertainment. "If our plans come to fruition, we should be launching in two years time and after that we start work on the sequel, so that's my medium-term future fairly well tied up. I plan to do quite a lot of skiing." Despite these projects, and the attraction of the Swiss slopes, he still hopes to make The Eye of the Moon one day, perhaps as a collaborative project with the Midnight community. In the meantime, you can always play the various remakes of the original games, and we'll have a round-up of the many faithful fan projects in the next issue of Retro Gamer. For now, Luxor the Moonprince lives on.



The War of the Solstice



In April 1998 the Midnight community came into possession of a design document by Mike Singleton for a remake of the original Lords of Midnight. The document clearly shows Mike's ongoing vision for his saga. It also shows his struggle with rationalising modern technology and expectations against the original simplicity of his games – an issue that he would raise in person in 2003: "I think the real problem if I do start on any remake is going to be how best to update the games. Bringing the graphic quality up-to-date is relatively easy, but the real problem starts to arise when trying to update the gameplay. That's the big question mark area as far as I'm concerned."

There are some questions raised by the existence of the document. In places it reads like an overview of The Citadel. Is this a modified document after The Citadel didn't turn out as expected? It also names the saga as a trilogy, and as the document is meant to be post Citadel, it's odd that Mike should so clearly ignore Eye of the Moon. It is also strange that Mike would be thinking about going back to part one before finishing off the saga.

One excerpt reads: "The War of the Solstice is Book I of the Lords of Midnight trilogy and the new game uses the same storyline, game map and characters as the very first Lords of Midnight game. The original game was a unique blend of strategic war game and adventure-style exploration, with navigation relying on a full 360° first-person view of the landscape from any point on the map. Quite deliberately, there was no in-game map the player could refer to; forcing him to use the panoramic landscape views to steer by sight. This gave a tremendous feeling of being there in a real place. Instead of seeing enemy armies as icons on a map, you could see them arrayed across the hills and plains in the distance, their flags flying. You were not a general leaning over the map table in your office, miles behind the lines; you were a warlord on your horse, at the head of your troops, leading them to battle. The War of the Solstice takes that same concept of being there and gives it the audio-visual power of late 1990s game technology. The aim throughout is to make The War of the Solstice look like a film but play like a game." This section quite clearly places any new idea in the context of the original, with the requisite visual sheen.



The next excerpt talks about the proposed decision-making processes and the user interface: "Strategic decisions are made during decision scenes. Here, for example, the hero stands gazing at the panoramic landscape he stands within. When he turns left or right, the panorama scrolls before him and the distant places beyond the horizon come to his mind. A small inset picture shows a view of the citadel, or tower or keep. A small inset map shows its location. If the hero stops turning, he speaks the name of the place he is thinking of. At a button press, he will speak its distance and how long such a journey would take. At a different button press, he will announce his intention to go there and set off on the journey. This visual method of journey selection maintains the sense of being there in the decision-making as much as in the action. Other pure decision-making is done in a similar fashion. Always, you are standing at your hero's shoulder, seeing the world as he sees it." This user interface would be unique and would fit well within the confines of the original Midnight games. It allowed the player to feel like they were interacting with the characters without having to control a real-time movement.

Pacemaker

In another excerpt, Mike talks about controlling the pace of the action: "The important thing for the player is deciding where his heroes and their armies are to go. The journey itself does not matter. You are a warlord, not a sight-seeing tourist. But what happens at the end of the journey matters a great deal. Consequently, once you have decided where a hero is going and what road he is to take, you see him set out on his journey and see him next when he arrives at his destination, where battle may be joined or other heroes recruited and further decisions made. You do not watch him march for mile after weary mile through the countryside.

"Some journeys, however, are eventful. The hero may be ambushed; he might spot enemy armies ahead in the distance or come across the smouldering ruins of a lonely farmhouse or village. When this sort of unexpected event happens, the computer interrupts the journey and puts the player in direct control of the hero again. By intelligently interrupting the unwatched journeys of the heroes, the computer automatically moves the on-screen action and decision-taking from one moment of drama to the next moment of drama. With four or more heroes on different journeys, the action scenes switch from one hero to another according to events, just like the scenes in a film or TV drama switch from following one thread of events to following another thread of events. So, as events unfold, the player takes on the role of whichever hero is engaged in action. All the ordinary minutes and hours and days of waiting or journeying are cut out. Time races ahead until the next extraordinary, exciting event and the next moment of decision, the next hero of the hour."

By the end we can see that Mike is still looking to create a real-time experience but seems to acknowledge that the player does not want to control a man moving around a landscape. 'Time racing ahead' was a process that could happen within The Citadel, but the player still had direct control over certain actions. Maybe Mike is accepting here that direct control has no place in Midnight. However, he kills it with the following revelations: "There are no interactive map screens, no god-like look-down views of the battlefield, no inventory screens, and no pop-up menus of weapon or magic selection. All the gameplay and decision-making takes place immediately, in real-time 3D, at the heart of the action. Then, between action scenes, a blend of FMV and non-interactive real-time 3D sequences tell the unfolding story, linking together every interactive scene you take part in. The emphasis of the gameplay is on action. The War of the Solstice is a unique blend of action-adventure (such as in Tomb Raider), single combat (such as in Tekken) and real-time command-and-control (such as in Warcraft), but all focused on the hero the player controls." RG*

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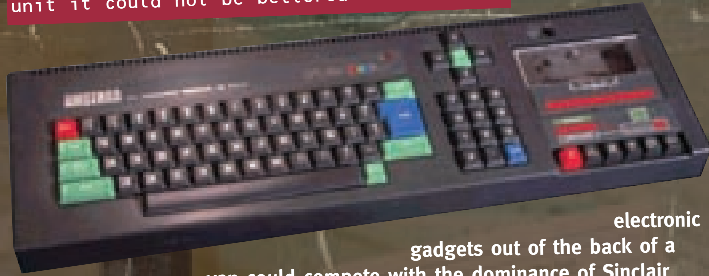

Now Amstrad gives you over £100 to play with.
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AMSTRAD CPC 464
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>Amstrad Action

The CPC range of home computers were very popular throughout Europe – never reaching the giddy heights of the Commodore 64 or Spectrum, but lapped up by a loyal user base all the same. Self-confessed Amstrad addict David Crookes explores the complete CPC range, including the later Plus models, and lifts the lid on the programmers who extended the natural life of the aging machine

In the days before PCs could be picked up for the price of a mouldy satsuma and a can of Iron Bru, serious computers were expensive and only sharp-suited businessmen working for rich firms could afford them. But at Westminster School on 11 April 1984, bearded entrepreneur Alan Sugar was showing off his new machine, and all that changed. He was unveiling the Amstrad CPC 464 which had been two years in the planning. At the time, Sinclair had pretty much wrapped up the market with its best-selling Spectrum machine. Sugar was eager to enter the fray and wanted to do for computers what he had done for the hi-fi.



The original CPC model. Not the prettiest machine by any means, but as an all-in-one unit it could not be bettered

Sugar daddy

In the early 80s, Alan Sugar had worked on creating a music revolution. Before he arrived, hi-fis were built out of separate components linked together at the back by wires. Sugar successfully housed the radio, amplifier, record player and tape deck in one combined unit. There were no external wires (save for the speaker cables) and just one plug to the mains.

At the time, computers were sold in a similar fashion to the old hi-fis. Spectrum users, for example, needed a television, a tape deck and the computer itself. And these all needed to be linked together and run with separate power supplies. By contrast, the CPC – which stood for Colour Personal Computer – had one monitor and one computer with an integrated tape deck. The power supply unit was inside the monitor and ran not only the display but also the computer, keyboard and tape device. Just two wires connected the monitor to the computer and everything was powered through a single plug.

Not only did this make the 8-bit CPC a simple system to set up, but it also served to slash the manufacturing costs. Affordability was Amstrad's watchword and the CPC provided that in abundance. The 464 sold for £200 with a green-screen monitor and £300 for the colour monitor bundle. And in time, the system came with a television modulator which enabled people to watch terrestrial TV on the monitor, creating the ultimate all-in-one package.

That it was marketed as a serious machine did not hold it back from becoming popular with gamers. It boasted 27 colours, 16 of which could be displayed in the lowest resolution mode, and it had 64Kb of memory. And of course, the integrated tape deck allowed for easy loading of games. The back of the CPC had ports for printers and other boring stuff like that, but there was also a slot for a joystick (although the one it came with was soon discarded since a couple of wiggles rendered it next to useless).

Sugar was onto a winner, defying his critics in the process. They didn't believe that a man who once made money from selling electronic gadgets out of the back of a van could compete with the dominance of Sinclair and Commodore. It was a good job it was a success, for if Amstrad's first computer had failed, the company itself may have folded – the firm had committed itself to 100,000 units before launch.



Alan Sugar, pictured at the launch of his new Amstrad CPC 464 computer

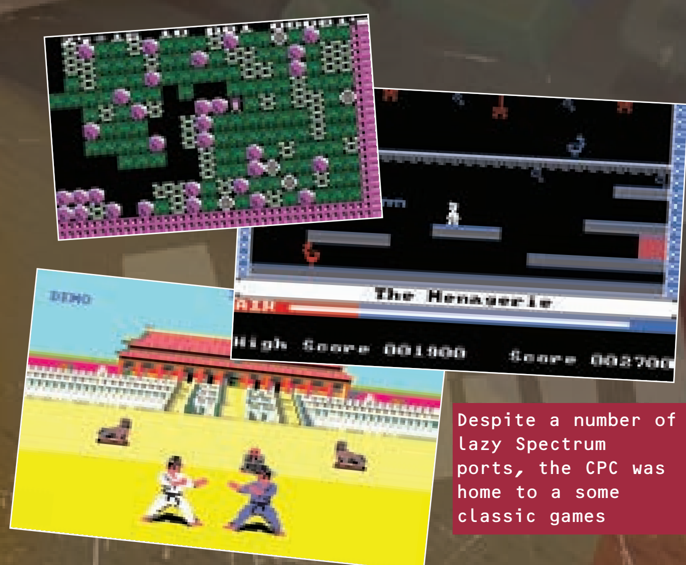
Part of the process

The initial CPC prototype (nicknamed Arnold) was built around a 6502 processor, the same one used in Commodore's VIC-20 and the Apple II, and it was to have 32Kb of RAM. Amstrad then searched for a good programming language and opted for BASIC. Rather than license Microsoft's popular version of the language, Amstrad decided it would create its own BASIC language and approached Locomotive Software to come up with a simple, easy-to-use system. The software firm, however, believed that the 6502 was too slow and urged Amstrad to try the Z80 instead. With the new processor decided upon, Amstrad went on to create the disk operating system, Amsdos, which it used alongside CP/M, an alternative to Microsoft's ultimately more successful DOS.

The 464 was a funny looking beast, long and thin with the tape deck to the right of the keyboard and with garish red, green and blue keys (a design feature 'borrowed' from Elan's Enterprise 64 machine). But it was not without its faults. Tapes were slow and unreliable. As with most tape-based computers, users often had to wait an age for a program to load only to see it crash seconds before it was finished. The 464 was also hindered by a lack of hardware sprite capabilities, and the 64Kb memory was merely sufficient. Still, the machine sold well in Britain and was also exported to France, Spain and Germany (where it was sold under the Schneider name). In total, two million 464s were sold throughout Europe.

By 1985, things were picking up. Any game released on the Spectrum and the Commodore soon found its way onto the Amstrad, firmly making it the third established player in the 8-bit market. It helped that the Spectrum and Amstrad shared the Z80 processor so Spectrum games could be easily converted. Often though, the programmers were lazy and produced straight ports without utilising the CPC's extra capabilities.

A whole host of peripherals were also launched, some by Amstrad and some by third-party producers. Most of them reinforced the machine's attraction for serious users and included speech synthesisers, extra memory, and video digitisers. In fact, the serious users propped up the machine's sales. The CPC had a mechanical keyboard, a numerical pad and a cursor pad. This gave



Despite a number of lazy Spectrum ports, the CPC was home to a some classic games

The CPC 472?

It's a little-known fact but there was an addition to the CPC range of Amstrads: the 472. And the history behind it is as interesting as the computer itself

The CPC 472 was distributed in Spain by a company called Indescomp. The firm was set up by Spaniard José Luis Dominguez, a man who wanted to make it big in business but was not sure which avenue to take. Dominguez had tried without success to become Spain's importer for Sinclair and Acorn. He had long been fascinated by the computer revolution and when he heard Amstrad had created the CPC, he contacted the firm.

Like Sinclair and Acorn, Amstrad rebuffed Dominguez, who went away to lick his wounds and write a game. This was to prove the turning point. Amstrad liked the game and wanted to snap it up but Dominguez said he would only allow that to happen if he became the Spanish CPC importer. Amstrad at first refused but later relented – on condition he write 10 games and bought the CPCs up front.

It cost Mr Dominguez a fortune to snap up 500 machines, but worse was to follow. At the time, Spain had yet to join the European Union and was sceptical of the foreign machine. The Spaniards believed it would help promote English at the expense of Spanish and were upset that the tilde (~) was not present on the keyboard. The Spanish Government was so unhappy that it put a tax on any computer with 64Kb or less that didn't have the tilde on the keyboard. So, playing the system, Dominguez decided to add an 8Kb module onto the machine to turn it into a 72Kb computer.

It was a move that was cheaper than changing the keyboard, and thus the CPC 472 was born. Bizarrely, the extra 8Kb was unusable and was there purely to avoid paying the tax. But to add further misery, the Spanish Government soon became wise to the wheeze and put the tax on all computers without the key.

It prompted Amstrad to change the keyboard, while keeping the extra 8Kb, resulting in two 472s – one with and one without the tilde. It was the only way they could shift the remaining stock.



The revised version of the CPC 472, complete with the tilde key

it a boost against the Commodore 64, which did not have a numerical pad – handy for quickly entering numerical data – and the rubber-keyed Spectrum, which had neither a numerical pad or cursor pad.

But it was the games which were exciting – The Way of the Exploding Fist by Melbourne House was an instant classic, as were Boulderdash and Manic Miner. The releases kept coming, most of them retailing for £9.95, and all of them paving the way for a fresh wave of programming talent.

Broadening the range

Such was the CPC's success that at the beginning of 1985, Amstrad tweaked the 464 and came up with the 664. It looked the same (although the cursor keys had been restyled), and Locomotive's BASIC had been updated to version 1.1, but the main addition was a built-in disk drive rather than a tape deck. This suited serious users since disk was a faster, more reliable way of storing data. The only problem was the memory – even in 1985, 64Kb was deemed too small, especially for business usage. Somewhat ironically, the 664 was codenamed IDIOT (Insert Disk Instead Of Tape).

By August 1985, less than a year since its launch, the 664 was killed off and replaced by the 6128. Following Amstrad's naming convention, the first digit referred to the main hard storage system – the '4' denoting a tape deck and the '6' a floppy disk drive. The remaining digits referred to the RAM capacity. So the 6128 had twice the amount of memory as the 664. Other changes were merely cosmetic. The keyboard was more compact – there was no longer a gap between the keyboard and the numeric/cursor pads – and the lack of coloured keys made the machine look more professional. As with the 664, the new machine was backward compatible, ensuring that the vast catalogue of 464 software was almost fully supported.

But retaining the 664's 3in disk drive was perhaps the worst thing Amstrad could have done. The disks held only 178Kb on each side and cost around £3 to buy. Within a couple of years, 3.5in disks had become standard, holding around 800Kb and costing as little as 50p. Third-party firms eventually created 3.5in drives for the CPC but no commercial software was released on the format. Its only real use was for backing up tape games onto cheaper, faster media.

To support Amstrad owners, the firm set up a CPC owners' club which had its own official magazine called Amstrad Computer User, a free technical support service and discounted software offers. But in 1988 Amstrad decided to hive it off to an outside company – a move which seemed to confirm to many users that Amstrad was displaying a lack of support for the machine. (That was certainly true four years later, when Amstrad Computer User lost its official status in 1992, became CPC Attack for six issues and was never seen again.)

Ugly rumours abounded that Amstrad was going to scrap the CPC, but the firm always strenuously denied these. For the next six years, the 464 continued to sell steadily but as time passed, Amstrad began to neglect it and concentrate more on the PCW range and then its first PC compatibles. Pundits within the industry believed the CPC's time was up and expected Amstrad to pull the plug.

In with the new

In June 1990, Amstrad quashed the rumours by making a shock announcement to journalists assembled in Paris. It was scrapping production of the 464 and 6128. Instead, a whole new version of the CPC was being launched – the Plus range.



The 464's successors swapped the tape drive for a built-in 3 in. floppy disk drive

It took its lead from the Atari ST and Amiga, with a sleek white design that was almost a carbon copy of the 16-bit favourites. The tape deck of the 464 and the disk drive of the 6128 were moved behind the keyboard and the old cardboard edge connectors were dispensed with and proper robust expansion ports were used instead. Amstrad spent £20 million on advertising the new range alone. Out went the CPC 464 and CPC 6128, and in came the 464 Plus and 6128 Plus with no mention of the CPC branding.

Amstrad certainly thought it was on to a winner with the Plus range. It based the new machines around the CPC but there was a fundamental difference – Amstrad had decided to take on the console market as well as that of the home computer. The spaceage-looking GX4000 was its answer to the Sega Master System and Nintendo Entertainment System. And to ensure that the console was not left as an isolated product, it added a cartridge port to its Plus range of computers.

The upshot was that all three machines had access to an improved range of cartridge games. These retailed typically for around £30. It was a bit of a culture shock for a generation used to paying between £2 and £10 for games, but it indicated Amstrad's shift away from a serious machine to one tailor-made for the massive gaming market.

There were some gripes: some people wished the Plus range had 3.5in disk drives rather than the 3in format of the old 664 and 6128; backward compatibility won out even though there was an increasing shortage of the more expensive 3in disks. Many expected the new machines to have a faster 6Mhz processor, but this was ruled out because, according to Roland Perry (who was then Amstrad's Group Technical Manager), it would have prevented the console from being used with a normal TV set.

But the biggest problem of all was that publishers writing for tape or disk formats were not granted access to the improved hardware of the Plus range. Amstrad was responsible for the manufacture and distribution of all cartridge releases and looked set to make a killing. And, by making the console features only accessible to cartridges, it ensured that third-party manufacturers could not bypass Amstrad when releasing games. Later, however, persistent programmers discovered ways of tapping into the advanced features and disk-based Plus games became reality.

The super-sleek Plus range, redesigned for a the 1990s





Gratis Games

The Amstrad CPC came with a host of free games and, like with all bundles, there were some winners, and more than a few stinkers

Ocean's Burnin' Rubber racing game was included as a free extra with the Plus machines, but the most memorable pack came with the CPC in 1989. It had a range of games from the likes of Ocean, Virgin, Leisure Genius, Imagine and Amsoft (Amstrad's own software company.) The package, which included a joystick and TV modulator, was completed by a desk and, bizarrely, a clock radio. Here's a full list of the games in the package, along with minireviews...

Trivial Pursuit Genus Edition (Domark, 1986)

The board game was incredibly popular in the 1980s so porting it over to the computer was an obvious choice, proving to be a winner for kids who got their CPC at Christmas and were able to say to their parents, "I told you the computer was educational."

Nonplussed

Amstrad had done its research. It had visited software houses to ask them for the features they wanted to see in the new range. Mr Perry said he wanted to make the lives of games writers easier: "That way," he enthused, " they produce better games and in the end we all have happier customers." The Plus range featured smooth hardware scrolling, better sound, and up to 16 colours could be used from a palette of 4,096. There were also 16 hardware sprites, each 16x16 pixels.

All three machines came with a decent car game called Burnin' Rubber which, graphically, was unlike any title ever seen on the Amstrad. It bore all the hallmarks of a 16-bit offering and impressed magazine reviewers and the buying public. Out went the bundled joystick packaged with the old CPC range – console-style paddles were introduced instead. Crucially, Amstrad tried hard to guarantee the loyalty of its existing CPC fan base while trying to attract thousands of new punters. To that end, the 464 Plus and 6128 Plus were backward compatible with the older machines. The one letdown was that the 6128 Plus didn't have a tape port, depriving its owners of access to hundreds of cheap cassette games. And, just as bad, 464 Plus owners could not connect an external disk drive.

Yet the 464 Plus with a colour monitor retailed at a reasonable £329, with the 6128 Plus at £429, both £30 more expensive than their 'ordinary' predecessors. The GX4000 sold for £99.

But it was not long before the console hit problems. Although there was a good range of games released for the machine including Batman The Movie and an updated version of Chase HQ, it could not compete with the established consoles. Amstrad may have put up a good fight against Sinclair and Commodore, but Sega and Nintendo were heavyweight opponents. Development houses around the world were pumping millions of pounds into Sega and Nintendo releases and the primarily European-based GX4000 couldn't compete.

It was not long before the console was being sold for as little as £25. Some users tried to bolt the consoles onto their normal CPCs when disk-based console games arrived. But the end had begun for Amstrad's 8-bit machines and within a couple of years, sadly the entire range was scrapped.



In Burnin' Rubber, players drove a red, Le Mans-style car around a gruelling, twisting race circuit against 12 other vehicles



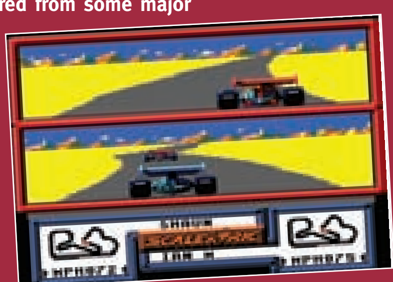




Up to six players could answer the questions and the game had a funny character called TP who would ask the questions and then tell you if got it right. It was better than the board game because the CPC was able to handle questions with diagrams and music, but it was a release which was put away quickly once the Christmas turkey had been devoured and digested.

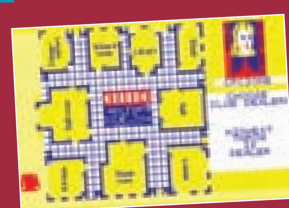
Scalextric (Leisure Genius/Virgin, 1987)

This was another computer version of a popular toy. Graphically, it was a treat but the gameplay suffered from some major flaws, not least a boring track and the frustrating manner in which a race would be brought to an abrupt halt when you crashed into an opposing car. There was a good section in which you could create your own tracks and this was the most fun part. But racing on them still proved dull.



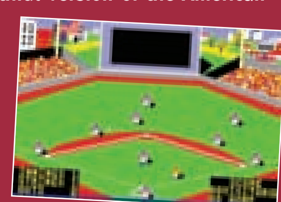
Cluedo, Monopoly and Scrabble (Leisure Games, 1985)

Unlike Trivial Pursuit, little was gained from reworking these board game favourites as computer games. The Amstrad's processor appeared unable to cope with the demands of the three separate titles and things moved along at a snail's pace. Each had players reaching back into the cupboard for the original, board-based versions.



World Series Baseball (Imagine, 1985)

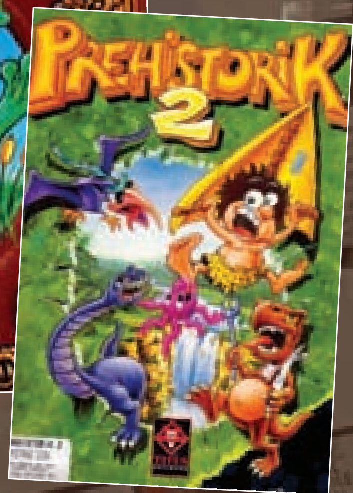
For many people this was their first proper introduction to playing baseball, and it seemed to be a rather faithful version of the American sport. Hitting a home run certainly cheered you up as a pleasant little ditty blasted out of the CPC's tinny speaker and the tiny players ran to victory to a roaring crowd. It felt very American and sometimes very real, but was initially difficult to get to grips with.



Keeping the CPC alive

When commercial interest in the CPC waned, it was left to the community to prolong the life of the machine with a series of home-grown games





Two of the last commercial games, written by Elmar Kreiger and published by Titus

By 1993, the Amstrad CPC was nearly 10 years-old. Commercial releases had dried up and the main computer magazine, Future Publishing's Amstrad Action, had shrunk in size to around 24 pages. The rot had set in the previous year, with distributors selling off games cheaply to clear stock, and software houses re-examining their full-price titles and knocking them out as budget releases. But thanks to a small bunch of self-taught programmers, who were knocking out a range of decent CPC games, the machine was kept alive for another couple of years.

Despite the disappearance of the larger software labels, enthusiasts across Europe (France and Austria in particular) were working hard to keep things afloat. Among them was Elmar Kreiger, an Austrian who created his own game's company, Elmsoft. The 20 year-old had written two of 1993's top-selling Amstrad games, Super Cauldron and Prehistorik 2, both released commercially by Titus. Platform game Super Caldron was released in June 1993 and retailed for £15.99. It was a sprawling game with smooth graphics, and is easily one of the best games to be released for the CPC. Prehistorik 2 proved to be equally as good – a neat console-style, cartoon platformer which had the player running and jumping around, beating up bad guys.

But the game for which Kreiger made his name was Zap T Balls, a clone of the well-received commercial title, Pang. Pang itself was only available on the ill-fated CPC

Hunchback (Amsoft/Ocean, 1984)



This was an early platform game and one of the best offerings in the Amstrad pack, if only because it was so easy to pick up and play. The graphics were basic but the controls were simple enough, and players soon got to grips with guiding Quasimodo through a number of screens while avoiding spears, fireballs and sharp arrows in pursuit of Esmeralda. It required some frustrating precision positioning of Hunchback but was fairly absorbing.

Hunchback 2: Quasimodo's Revenge (Ocean, 1985)

This inevitable sequel saw Quasimodo attempting to rescue Esmeralda once again. And just how difficult was it to get her back? Hunchback 2 had Quasimodo swinging around on ropes and jumping around so much his back must have been aching with the vibration. The graphics, even by CPC standards, were also poor.



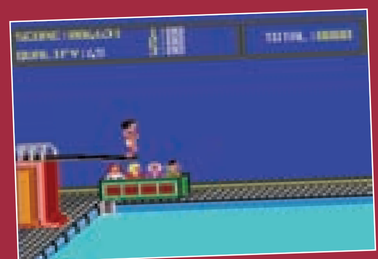
Doors of Doom (Amsoft/Gem, 1985)

This was a bizarre game with cutesy cartoon graphics which had you exploring a series of landscapes in search of little scraps of a door. When put together, the pieces would have saved mankind from something or other – it was never clearly explained. A very English game, this had lush green pastures and cups of tea for refreshment.



Daley Thompson's Supertest (Ocean, 1986)

This had the player waggling the joystick like there was no tomorrow to increase Daley's strength or speed. The graphics, varied events and sheer endurance required made it a memorable game, even if it did destroy the flimsy joystick which came with the CPC.



Plus machine and was therefore out of reach for the majority of Amstrad owners. Kreiger's version opened up the great gameplay of the original to everyone else, creating a fast, furious and admittedly frustrating game which showed off some amazing graphics. Unlike Super Caldron and Prehistorik 2, Zap T Balls was sold via mail order from a small independent London-based company called Sentinel. Only those who had stuck with the CPC and regularly picked up dedicated magazines or fanzines knew of the game's existence. Yet it still sold in sufficient quantities for Sentinel to become a major player on the CPC scene.

On the ropes

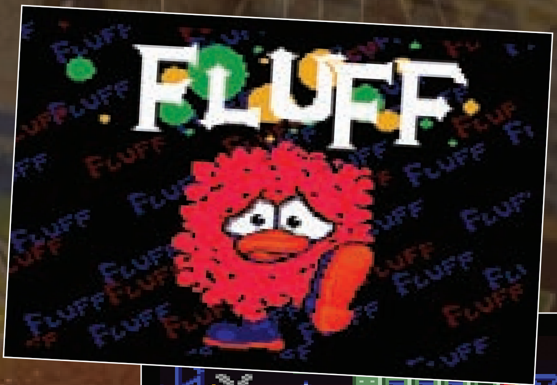
The Amstrad's future had changed. Its dwindling band of users who were once used to popping into their local videogame shop and walking away with a £2.99 CPC cassette were gone. Now software had to be hunted out and a host of small firms flourished, plugging the holes left empty by Ocean, Domark, US Gold and the other firms that had quit the machine months earlier.

Kreiger was typical of the coders still hacking away at the CPC. He had grown up with the computer and had become proficient in machine code. Tellingly, he had approached Ocean and offered to convert Pang from the CPC Plus to the original CPC range. But Ocean refused his offer, and as he had already spent too much time on the project to abandon it, he turned to the independents.

Another big player to emerge on the smaller scene was Rob Buckley. Years earlier, the Londoner had created a stunning public domain adventure game entitled Eve of Shadow. Later in 1993, he teamed up with Richard Wildey, of Sentinel Software, and Richard Fairhurst, a programmer and magazine writer. They looked at creating a Street Fighter 2 clone called Lethal Moves. At the time, US Gold had been tantalising Amstrad owners with plans to release SF2 for the CPC, but as the weeks and months passed, gamers began to realise the title would never see the light of day. It was unsurprising for many who wondered exactly how US Gold planned to replicate the classic fighting game on the CPC with only 64Kb of memory. Lethal Moves was planned for 128Kb and was to be released on the disk-based 6128 and 6128 Plus. Sadly, the game never saw the light of day, although the company's ambitions were both genuine and admirable.

Creating a stir on the CPC nine years after it was created was Fluff, the CPC's answer to Sega's Sonic the Hedgehog. Buckley produced a game based around a Doc Marten-wearing ball of fluff (!) and had it whizzing around 12 absorbing levels. This platform game was superb fun and had incredible staying power. Once again, it was not released in the shops – Buckley made it available direct from his own company which he called Radical Software. The new software house went on to release other top games including Odiesoft's Megablasters (a clone of the Super Bomberman on the SNES), and Masters of Space (a sci-fi shoot-em-up). Meanwhile, Richard Wildey's Sentinel continued to sell games including Zap T Balls and Ball Bearing, in which players guided a bouncing ball around a series of levels.

But there were many other programmers vying for attention. Scott and Gary Kennedy from Salford tried to drum up commercial interest in their game, Trakers, but eventually decided to release it themselves. Trackers was similar to Dizzy and



This cool Sonic clone really utilised the Plus range's extra capabilities



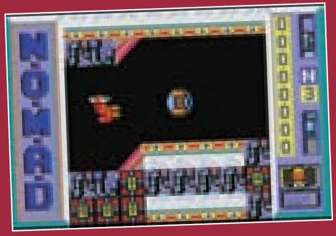
Roland In Time (Amsoft/Gem, 1985)

This was apparently named after Amstrad's technical guru Roland Perry, and had him in a Doctor Who guise, whizzing backwards and forwards through time to any one of 10 time zones. Yes, he used a phone box to travel and yes, there was whooshing noise whenever he went through time. And yes, it was a complete low-budget sci-fi rip off. It was also difficult and looked rubbish.



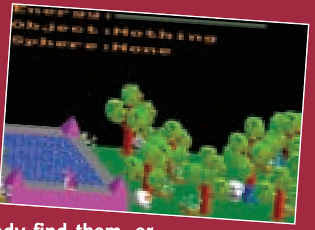
NOMAD (Ocean, 1986)

Here's a question: why did Amstrad bundle so many difficult games into one package? NOMAD was arguably the most frustrating of the lot. Just turning the droid around was hard enough, but getting it through missile-strewn mazes was damn-near impossible. You had to turn the droid to face the way in which you wanted it to go and then push forward, but that was easier said than done. After grappling with this for a while, you soon gave up.



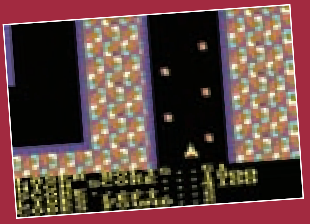
Qabbalah (Amsoft, 1986)

Unusual name and even stranger game. For one, it was so damn hard to play – theme here? – and it was also completely baffling. You started by walking around a fairly regular suburban area – albeit one with skulls roaming around – dressed like Santa Claus, and the idea was to find a number of objects. But did anybody find them, or did most people walk around the back of a few buildings, get completely lost and wonder if they would ever see their character again? One of the world's worst games, ever.



The Prize (Amsoft, 1985)

Remember those type-ins in the old magazines? This game was hardly much better than the stuff you would get with them. It looked terrible and was incredibly repetitive, basically making the player fly around a few mazes collecting stuff and shooting whatever was in your way. Nowadays it wouldn't even get onto a mobile phone. In those days, many wondered how it got onto a home computer in a bundle supposed to be showing off the capabilities of a £300 machine.







Reminiscent of Dizzy, but Trackers was still a great game in its own right

had players controlling a little droid through a flick-screen world collecting and using items to solve puzzles. It was so good, Amstrad Action gave it a two-page review and awarded it 92%.

Down but not out

As the independent releases from the likes of Radical continued to flow, an underground scene of free games also flourished. Many games programmers just wanted to see their titles in the hands of gamers and did not want to profit from them. They released their games into the public domain which made them freely available to anyone who wanted them. Public domain libraries sprang up in homes across Europe and punters would send them stamped-addressed envelopes requesting a list of software. When they received the lists, the gamers would choose the titles they wanted, bung a disk in the post with some cash (usually about a pound which was passed off as a copy charge), and then received the disk back bulging with free games.

It was a precursor to downloading from the Internet, only more cumbersome. Yet it enabled gamers to play some wonderful offerings for mere pennies. Among the big-name freebies was the brilliant French game Croco Magneto on which Ball Bearing had been based. Another French title, Les Mings (written by Claude Le Moullec), was a clone of Lemmings that had all the richness of the original yet none of the cost. Finding the best proved difficult. Once Amstrad Action bit the dust in June 1995, and the fanzines which had propped up the machine for a little while longer closed, the scene began to fade, killed of by fresh, faster technology.

Which is ironic, since it's these same technological advances that have brought us the Internet and the modern PC – the very tools we can now use to download CPC games and run them through emulation.

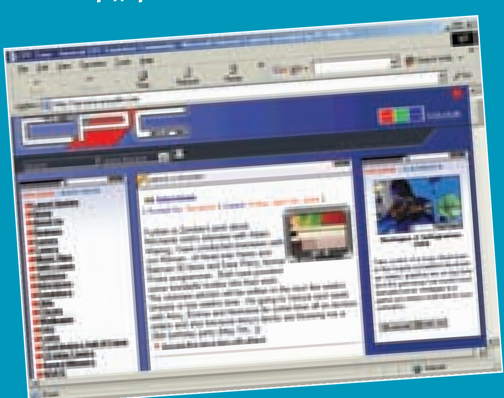


Late in the CPC's life, Croco Magneto was distributed freely though PD libraries

Web resources

CPC Zone

Former Amstrad users should make this their first stop. It's an amazing site that's bang-up-to-date (a rarity nowadays, sadly) and packed with the latest news. It has reviews, mobile phone logos, cheats, emulators and, interestingly, CD inlay covers. Basically, a group of people are spending time reproducing old CPC game covers into PC CD-ROM ones, all strictly for fun but well worth looking at. Webmaster Malc Jennings deserves respect.
http://cpczone.emuunlim.com



CPC Game Reviews

Nicholas Campbell has put together the ultimate Amstrad game review site. It's well worth checking this out before downloading any CPC games to see if the title you want should be taking up hard drive space. All reviews are well written and informative and come with screenshots. An absolutely brilliant resource.
www.cpcgamereviews.com

The Amstrad CPC Games Resource

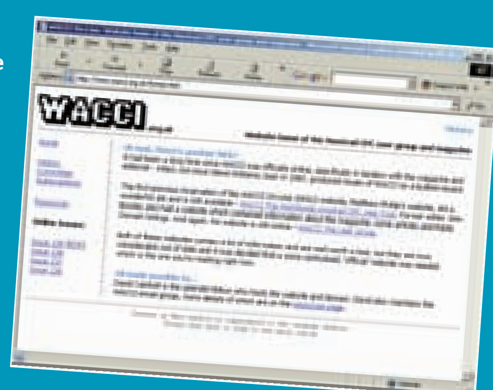
If you are looking for downloads, then this is the place. It's packed with games, even those which were written by independent programmers when the commercial players decided to leave the machine. It's clearly laid out and should definitely be on your list of bookmarks.
http://tacgr.emuunlim.com

CPC Scene

A website dedicated to listing the movers and shakers of the emulation world, charting the latest improvements by those with the technical know-how. More of a specialist site.
www.cpcscene.com

WACCI

This site doesn't get updated as much as it used to but it's still a good resource. WACCI is a user group which has been going for a couple of decades and used to produce a monthly magazine, mainly for those interested in serious computing.
www.wacci.org.uk





>Emulation nation

Despite what purists may say, emulation is a wonderful thing. It enables you to experience just about every computer and console ever released, and ensures that even the rarest machines never disappear and die. In the latest of our emulation features, Martyn Carroll looks at resurrecting rare machines on your home PC and explains how to set up the emulators and run software. The feature also lists useful Web resources, and all of the emulators can be found on this month's coverdisc



Amstrad PCW

You can use the Joyce emulator to run the Amstrad PCW range of computers (the PCW 8000, 9000 and 10 series computers are supported, but not the PCW 16). The first PCW model was released back in 1985 and a further six models followed. Based around the old Z80 processor, the PCW was primarily used for word processing and therefore never really threatened the mighty IBM PC. Like the Amiga though, the machine is still popular throughout Europe and it's estimated that there are around 200,000 PCWs still in use.

In order to emulate the PCW, Joyce requires either an original LocoScript disk or the Amstrad CP/M disk. Both were supplied with the PCW and you cannot run Joyce without them. Start by running the setup.exe file and then insert either of the disks into the drive. Simply specify the letter of your floppy drive and then wait for the disk image to be created. Once this has been done, double-click the joyce.exe file and run the disk image. For more information, refer to the PDF readme file, or visit author John Elliot's website at **www.seasip.demon.co.uk**.



Apple II

At the dawn of the personal computer there were two mere mortals – Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs – and an Apple. But rather than being a poisonous fruit, the Apple soon begat the Apple II, which was the pick of the early general purpose computers. Released in 1977, the Apple II included colour graphics, 4Kb RAM and a whopping 12Kb ROM. Due to its huge popularity in the US as both a home and business computer, the machine was continually improved upon and the Apple II+, Apple IIe and Apple IIgs followed in 1979, 1983 and 1986 respectively. However, the machine was nowhere near as popular in the UK, hence its inclusion here.

The AppleWin program enables PC users to emulate the II+ and IIe models, and you can choose between the two by clicking the Configuration button. To run a program, click the Toolbar button labelled Master and then locate an Apple II disk image (.dsk). Click Open and then hit the Run button (it is marked with the Apple logo). If you receive a memory error message, switch to Apple IIe mode and try to run the program again. A comprehensive FTP site containing hundreds of compatible utilities and games can be found at **ftp://ftp.apple.asimov.net/pub**.

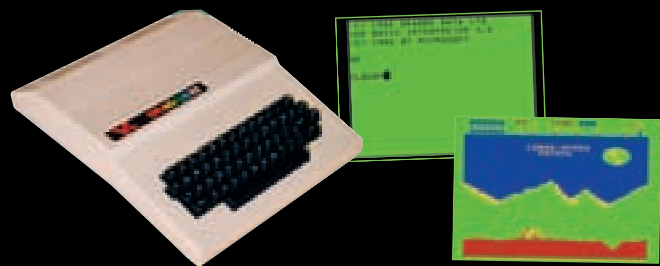
Cambridge Computers Z88

Z88Dream emulates Sir Clive Sinclair's Z88 portable. Having sold Sinclair to Amstrad in 1986, Sir Clive established Cambridge Computers and designed this very lightweight laptop. It featured 128Kb of memory, could be powered by four AA batteries, and came bundled with built-in



software, including PipeDream (a combined word processor, database program and spreadsheet package). The machine launched in 1988 (hence its name), but it was far from the revolutionary hardware Sir Clive hoped it would be. Sales were poor and it proved to be his last computer.

By running Z88Dream you can access the built-in software immediately (use the cursor keys to scroll up and down and press Enter to select). EPROM images can be loaded by selecting File/ Load.



Dragon 32/64

T3 will faithfully emulate the 8-bit Dragon personal computer under Windows. The Dragon was a popular machine in the UK during the early 1980s. It was based upon the Motorola 6809 processor and it came in two variants, the Dragon 32 (the basic 32Kb RAM model) and the Dragon 64 (an enhanced 64Kb RAM machine with built-in serial port). Both versions came complete with Microsoft Extended Color BASIC, and it was possible to boot into the Unix-like OS9 operating system.

To use T3 you need to download the 17Kb Dragon Boot ROM from **www.zophar.net/coco.html** and place it in the same folder as the T3 executable. Drop some Dragon software into the same folder (visit **http://membres.lycos.fr/romch/tosec/dragon32** for hundreds of programs) and then run the emulator. Type *cloadm*, press Enter, and type in the name of the program you want to load. If an OK prompt then appears, type *exec* and press Enter again. See the readme file for detailed instructions. The author's website is located at **www.burgins.com/dragon.html**.



Enterprise 64/128

Enter perfectly emulates the 8-bit Enterprise computer. Never heard of it? We're not really surprised, because the machine was in direct competition with other Z80-based computers of the time, namely the ZX Spectrum and the Amstrad CPC. The machine was launched in January 1985 and Enterprise Computers Ltd was liquidated 18 months later. It was just another casualty of the home computing wars of the 1980s, yet the Enterprise was an interesting machine. It was available in both 64Kb

and 128Kb versions and featured multiple resolutions, 256 colours, three-channel sound and its own CP/M-compatible operating system called EXOS. It even included a built-in joystick for game fans!

Enter comes with all the necessary ROM files so you can run programs immediately. When the emulator is running, click File/ Search Directory For Tape Files and browse to the location containing the software. Then type *Load ""* to run the program. Enterprise tape files can be downloaded from **www.mumm.ac.be/~cammejpm/ enterprise/archive**.

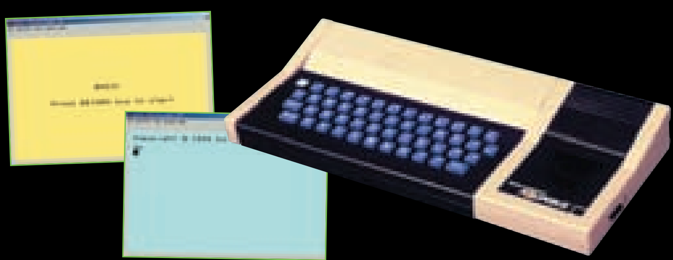




Jupiter Ace

The Ace32 emulator replicates the Z80-powered Jupiter Ace computer on your PC. This micro was released in 1983 and was designed by two former Sinclair Employees – hence its similarity to the ZX Spectrum. But whereas the Spectrum and just about every other home computer at the time used a version of BASIC as their standard programming language, the Jupiter Ace featured Forth – a stack-based language favoured by professional programmers. The Jupiter Ace was not a success, mainly due to a lack of software support, and the company behind the machine went bust in 1984.

Ace32 emulates the machine perfectly and Ace software can be downloaded from **http://users.aol.com/autismuk/ace/software.htm**. To load a program, run the Ace32 executable and press F5. Select the game, then type in *load* and press Enter. Finally, type in *go*, press Enter again and the software will run.



Mattel Aquarius

AqEmu is the only colour emulator available for the Mattel Aquarius, which is not surprising really because the Aquarius was one of several home computers that sprang onto the scene in the early 80s and then disappeared just as quickly. It was released in 1983 and yet Mattel's own programmers found it so difficult to develop for that they referred to it as "A system for the Seventies"! Accordingly only some basic office software and a few games were released and Mattel pulled the plug on the computer in early 1984. Still, the machine came with Microsoft BASIC built-in so users could at least cobble together some programs of their own.

You can use AqEmu to resurrect the Aquarius on your PC. Games can be downloaded from the Web (Google is your best friend!) and then all you need to do is select File/ Load Cartridge Image and select a .bin file to boot.

MSX 1/2/2+

The MSX was a 1980s' home computer that was extremely popular in Asia and South America but never really made an impression in the UK or the US. The machine was conceived in an attempt to establish a single computing standard and released in 1983. MSX actually stood for MicroSoft eXtended BASIC, the programming language supplied with the machine. The MSX2 and MSX2+ followed, but the MSX standard finally died a death around 1990.

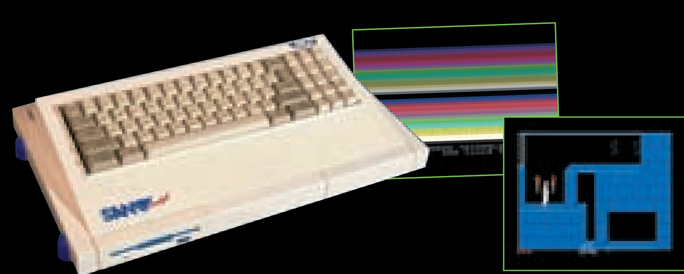
ParaMSX emulates all of these machines perfectly. Having unzipped the archive, run the launcher.exe file and attach a cart (.rom), disk (.dsk) or tap (.tap) image. Then press the Start button and the software will run. The emulator replicates the speed of the original MSX, but if this is too slow for your 21st century tastes then you can increase the CPU clock speed. Such was the popularity of the MSX, numerous games can be downloaded from the Internet. We recommend you check out **www.msxgamesbox.com**.



Oric-1/Atmos/Telestrat

Euphoric is an emulator that allows you to run the Oric family of 8-bit computers on your PC. The first computer, the Oric-1, was released in 1983 and originally retailed for £170, which at the time was quite reasonable for a 48Kb colour computer. Sales were poor, however, mainly due to the growing popularity of the Spectrum. Undeterred, Oric released the Atmos a year later. The machine featured a proper typewriter-style keyboard, a new version of Extended Microsoft BASIC and an optional 3in disk drive. Oric's final machine was the Telestrat, which received a limited release in France in late 1986. The company folded a year later.

Euphoric emulates each machine including the rare Telestrat – just run the appropriate shortcut. To load tape-based games, place them in the Tapes folder, double-click the Oric-1 shortcut and type *CLOAD""* – be sure to remove the extension from the filename, however.



Sam Coupe

The Sam Coupe was nicknamed the 'Super Spectrum', but don't let its fans hear you call it that! The Sam was much more than a Spectrum,

boasting 128 colours, a faster version of the good-old Z80 CPU and a built-in 3.5in disk drive. Sadly, this powerful 8-bit was released in 1989, around the time when the 16-bit machines really started to take hold. It's believed that only around 10,000 machines were ever sold, but a dedicated fanbase keeps the machines alive. In fact, a company called Quazar (**www.quazar.clara.net**) still develops software and hardware for the Sam, and the latest scene developments can be read about in its Sam Revival magazine.

The Sim Coupe emulator comes bundled with the original ROMs, so all you need to do is download some disk images (an archive is located at **ftp://ftp.nvg.ntnu.no/pub/sam-coupe**) and then run the emulator. Click File/ Floppy 1/ Insert and select a disk image, then press 9 on your PC's numeric keypad to boot the game. See **www.simcoupe.org** for more information.



Sega SC-3000

When somebody mentions Sega you immediately think of game consoles. This was not always the case, however. Back in 1983 the Japanese developer released the SC-3000 – an updated version of their SG-1000 console, which featured a rubber keyboard and a serial printer interface. It came bundled with a BASIC cartridge so that the user could actually enter their own programs. The machine was sold in Japan and Australia, but never made it any further west, making it something of a collectable item in Europe.

Fear not though, because you can use SC3K to faithfully emulate the SC-3000 computer under Windows. During emulation, press F1 to access the main menu and then press F2 to bring up the game list. F5 removes the scan lines from the screen display, while F4 toggles between joystick and keyboard input (the default key set-up is the cursor keys for movement and Right Ctrl for fire).



Sharp x68000

Our journey through the world of obscure computers and consoles continues with the Sharp x68000. This unique Japanese computer was released in 1987 and was never marketed outside its home territory. It was powered by a Motorola MC 68000 processor running at 10MHz and was generally more powerful than both the Atari ST and Amiga 500 (it could display 65,535 colours for a start). The machine ran under Human 64K – an operating system very similar to MS-DOS. Rather bizarrely, x68000 development is still active and several OSes, including Minix and NetBSD, have recently been ported to the platform. Work is also underway on a GUI operating system named Ko-Windows.

If you want to run the computer on your PC you can use the EX68 emulator. The program emulates the hardware, firmware and operating system, and is ideal for running the many games released for the system (game ROMs can be downloaded from the Web). The documentation is in Japanese, but the emulator is easy to use.

First download the required boot ROM files from **http://xperiment.rainemu.com/x68downloads.html** and unzip them both into the EX68 folder. Add some game files then run ex68.exe. When the emulator asks for a disk, click on one of the FDD buttons and browse to a game file. Select Open and the game will run.



Sinclair QL

QLAY faithfully emulates the Sinclair QL, a rather unique machine of yesteryear. Throughout it's elongated development period, the QL was known as the ZX83 but it certainly wasn't a direct successor to the earlier Sinclair machines. Instead of using the Z80 processor once again, Sir Clive placed a Motorola MC 68008 at the heart of the new machine so the name, Quantum Leap, was somewhat apt

To use QLAY, run the executable and then assign a ROM file to MDV1. Increase the Speed value to around 5,000 (higher if you have a fast PC) and then click the OK button. When the QL screen appears, press F1 and type in *lrun mdv1_boot*. Finally, press Enter to load the ROM file.

For more information, visit the QLAY homepage at **http://web.inter.nl.net/hcc/A.Jaw.Venema**.



SORD-M5

Here's one you may not be familiar with, as this Japanese computer was only popular in its home country. Powered by the Z80 and featuring just 4Kb of internal RAM (memory expansions were available), the M5 shared many of the characteristics of the later MSX computers. Obviously, they're quite rare these days and sought after by collectors.

The cleverly titled SORD-M5 Emulator is a work in progress, but it ran all the games we tested. It runs full-screen, so you need to place ROMs in the same directory as the emulator and press F2 to bring up the ROM list. Use the cursor keys to browse the list and press Enter to select a ROM. Press Escape to quit the emulator at any time. RG*

>Console emulation

Atari Jaguar

Project Tempest is the first emulator to run commercial games for the Atari Jaguar, the world's first 64-bit home console. The machine was released in late 1993, after three years of research, and at the time offered graphic and sound capabilities beyond any other console. It sold well, initially at least, but it was difficult to program for the system and only a few quality games were released. Time was effectively called on the console around 1996, with the release of the Sega Saturn and Sony PlayStation.

As with a lot of the more recent emulators, Project Tempest is very easy to use. Select File/ Open ROM and choose a game, then press F2 to start playing. At present, only a few commercial games are supported, but the emulator is continually updated, so check http://pt.emuunlim.com for the latest releases. A fast PC (2GHz plus) is required for sound emulation.





Commodore CDTV/CD32

Perhaps spurred on by the success of the Super Nintendo and Sega Megadrive, Commodore entered the console market in the early 90s with their CDTV and CD32 machines. The CDTV was launched in 1991 and was the first console to be sold with a built-in CD-ROM. Besides this addition, it was little more than an Amiga 500 computer crammed into a little black box. Similarly, the CD32 was basically a console version of the popular Amiga 1200 computer. Neither machine was a success and Commodore was sold on shortly after they were released.

Lots of games were released for the machine and you can play them on your PC using the Akiko emulator. This shareware program does not include support for downloaded disc images so you'll need original games (check eBay). Just place the disc in your PC CD-ROM drive and the game will run. Original Amiga Kickstart ROM files are also required, as well as a copy of WinUAE, the Amiga emulator, which is available from www.winuae.net. The Akiko homepage is located at www.softwarefailure.de/en/prod_akiko.html.

PC Engine/TurboGrafx-16

Hu6280 perfectly emulates the PC Engine, a games console that was big in Japan but largely ignored in just about every other country. Unlike the Sega Master System and the NES, the machine offered near arcade-quality conversions of the latest games, which was mind-blowing back in 1987. The machine was later released in the US as the TurboGrafx-16, and a handheld version (the PC Engine GT) made it to Europe, but the console failed to take off. The machine thrived in Japan though and over 700 games were released. Many of these can be downloaded from www.classicgaming.com/thedump/tg16.

Hu6280 is extremely easy to use. Simply run the .exe file and you'll be prompted to select a HuCard (.pce) file. Click Open and your chosen game will then load. The PC Engine joypad is mapped to the cursor keys, with A and Z acting as the fire buttons. See the accompanying readme file for the full list of keyboard controls.



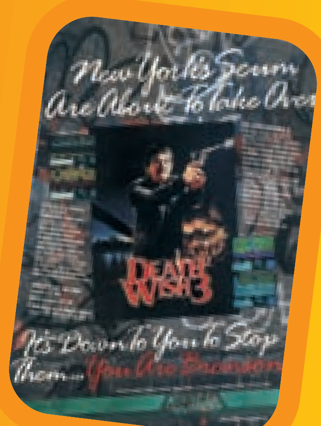
1986 advertising gallery



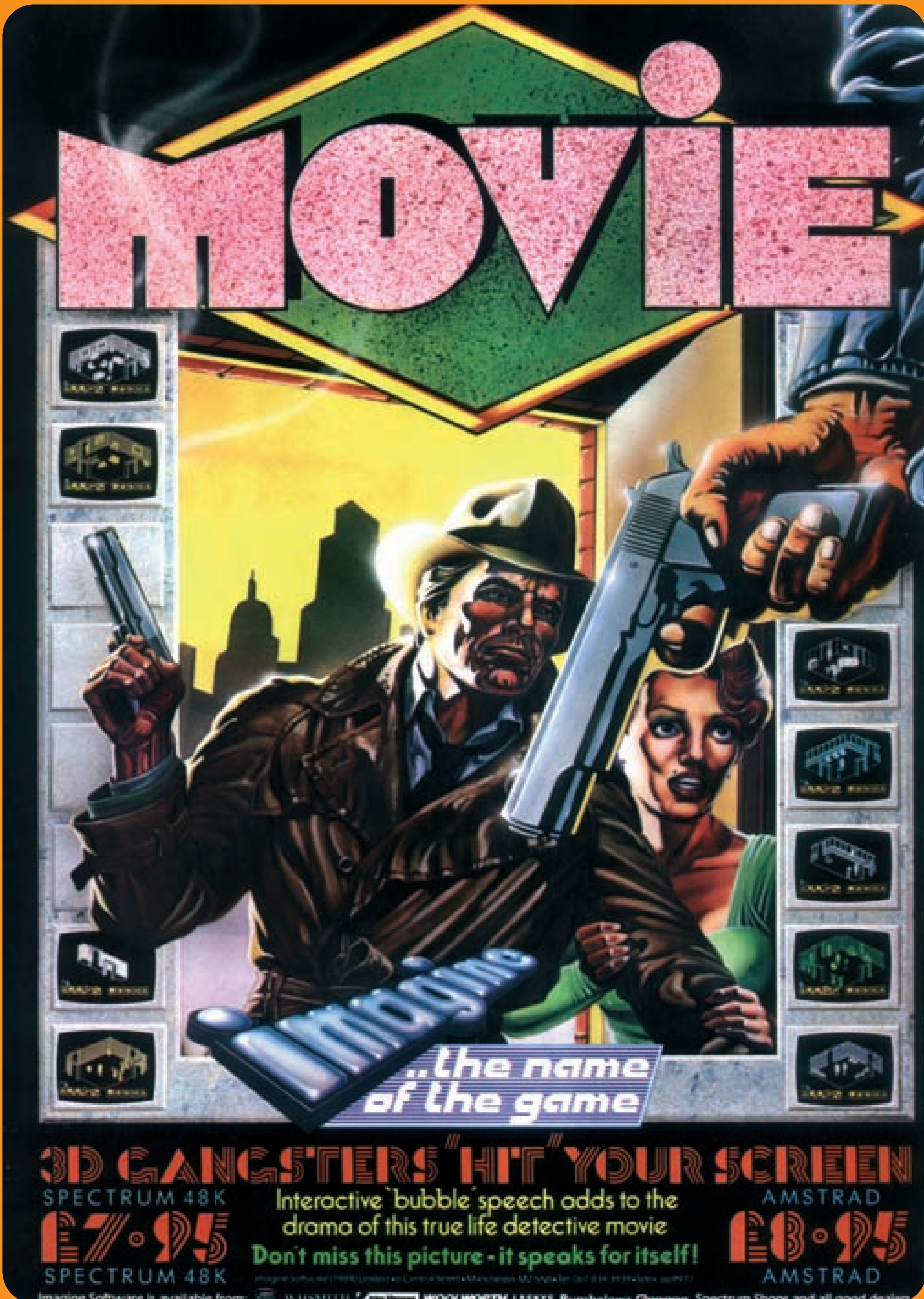








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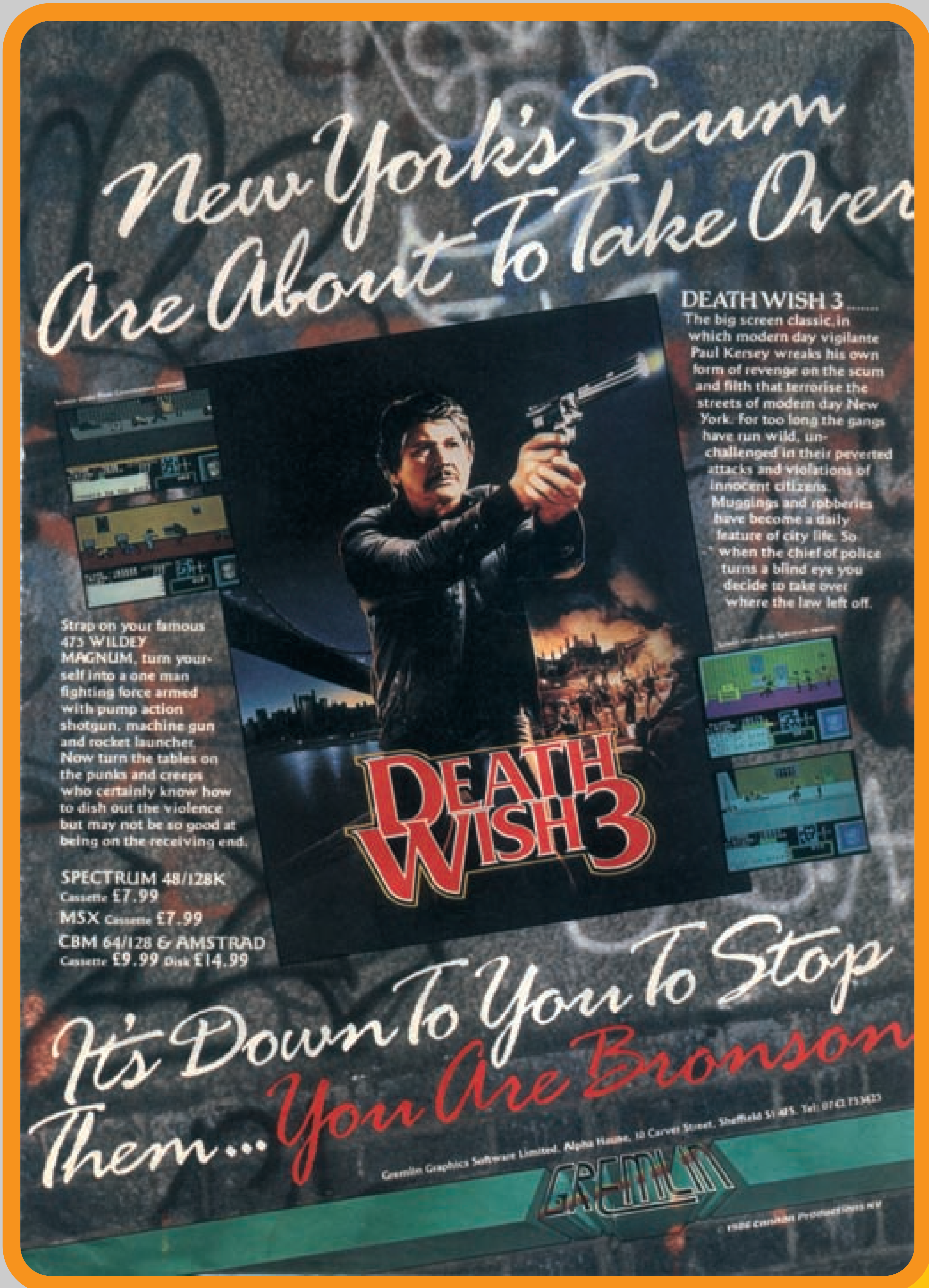

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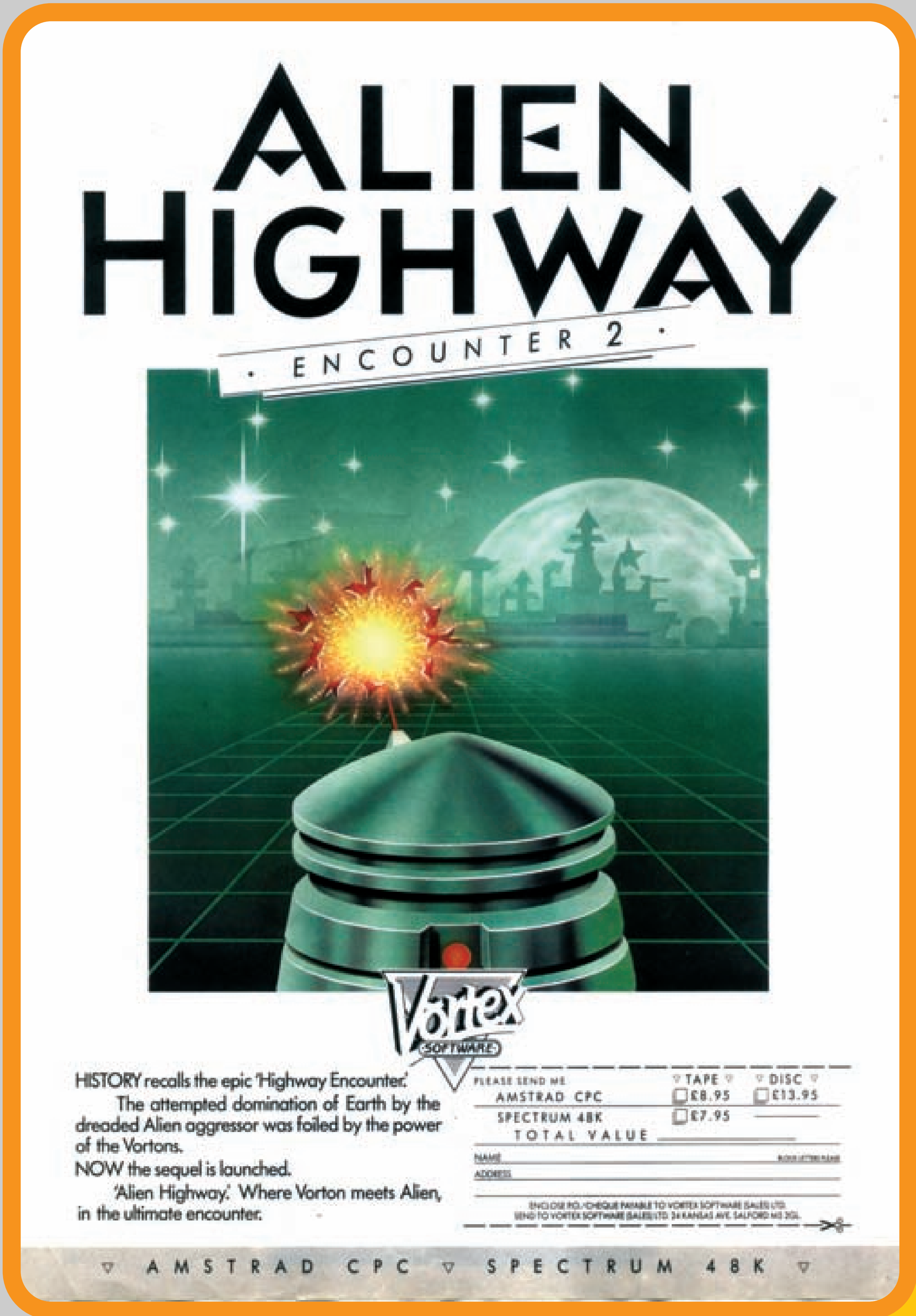

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Retro Gamer Coverdisc

The issue 4 coverdisc is a mixed-media affair, which means that it contains both audio and video files. Place the disc in a standard CD player and you can listen to 18 retro-themed tracks. Alternatively, drop the disc in your PC drive and you'll have access to PC retro remakes, emulators and other useful tools. In addition, the audio tracks can be played through your PC using your standard audio player



step 1 Place the coverdisc into your CD/DVD drive and it should start automatically. If not, select Run from the Start menu and enter D:\browser.exe (assuming that D: is the letter of your CD/DVD drive). When the browser appears, click OK to accept the declaration.



step 2 Some programs are provided as .exe files and these will run or install straight from the disc. If the program chooses to install itself, simply follow the onscreen prompts and then wait while the files are copied to your hard drive.



step 3 Many programs are stored in .zip files, so you might need an archive manager like WinZip, which is under the Misc Utilities browser tab. Extract all the files from the .zip archive using the Extract feature and place them in an empty folder, then run the .exe file.



step 4 If you are looking for a particular program, click the Search button and enter a keyword. The browser program will search the disc and place all the relevant results under the left most browser tab. They can now be accessed directly from here.

Problem solving

If you're having a problem with a particular program on our coverdisc, please view the help file in the program for assistance. You might also consider visiting the website of the program author for further help. If this fails, please email: **techsupport@livepublishing.co.uk**.

If you are having problems with the CD, first check that it is not dirty or scratched. CDs can be cleaned by holding them under the cold water tap and gently rubbing the silver side with a tissue. Dry it carefully with another tissue.

If the disc still doesn't work, then it may be faulty. Faulty discs should be returned to Retro Gamer, Live Publishing International Ltd, Europa House, Adlington Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire, UK, SK10 4NP. We will replace all genuinely faulty discs.

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DISCLAIMER

Some of the programs on the Retro Gamer disc interact with your PC on a fundamental level. We strongly advise you back up your personal data before using the disc. Due to the way the Retro Gamer disc is compiled, Retro Gamer, Live Publishing International Limited and/or any associated company and/or individual cannot take responsibility for damage to your PC or otherwise arising from use of the coverdisc. **You use the programs on the disc at your own risk.**

PC Retro Remakes

The coverdisc contains 25 new retro games for your PC. Not sure where to start? Let us show you the way with our guide to the best games on the CD



XOR

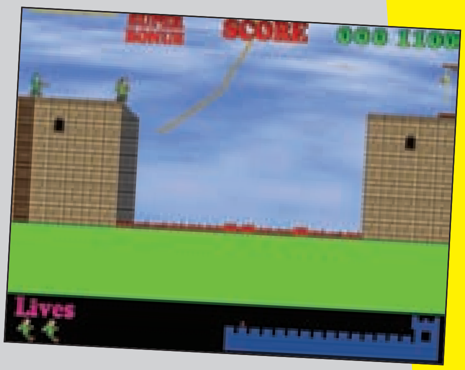
XOR is a remake of a classic game from Ovine by Design that appeared on many formats (most memorably on the BBC and RISC machines), and was released as Prospector in the Mazes of Xor for the Amiga. You are trapped in a labyrinth and you must escape by collecting enough happy faces. There are no random elements to this game. Each object can only be moved or removed according to set rules and everything that changes has certain consequences on the play. It really is a case of trial and error to progress to the next labyrinth, but the rewarding gameplay makes it all worthwhile. XOR has a total of 15 levels, with a combination of puzzle and maze elements.

Spheres of Chaos

This inspired reworking of Atari's Asteroids looks and feels very much like a game that the esteemed Mr. Minter might come up with. You are welcomed with a very busy title screen containing exploding spheres and a menu which allows you to change certain parameters in the play field. Each explosion leaves behind colourful debris, which quickly creates an interesting and very busy screen. As you can manipulate certain gameplay elements, such as adding borders or changing the gravity attributes, the end result is a very interesting game, and a more than worthy take on an established classic.

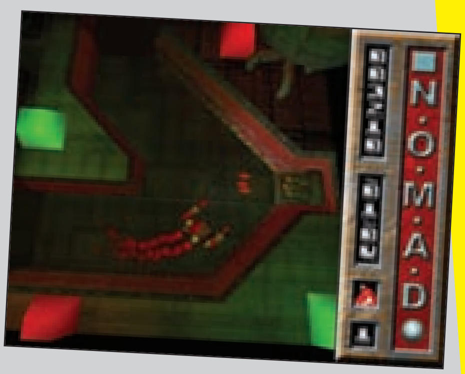
Hunchback

Ocean Software produced home versions of this popular arcade game back in 1984, and 20 years later this faithful update by Scottigesoft allows players to take control of old Quasimodo once again. You have been given the task of traversing the castle walls to rescue and free the trapped Esmeralda, which obviously is not as easy as it sounds. Many hazards have been placed in your way and to make matters worse there is a guard out to foil your plans. You'll need to have your wits about you, as sharp reactions and pixel perfect jumps are required. Good luck!



Pyjamarama

The second of Mikro-Gen's Wally Week games is arguably the best, perhaps bettered only by Three Weeks in Paradise. This accurate PC remake retains all the weird puzzles and mini-games, making it a must-play experience for fans of the original 8-bit adventure. You goal is to guide Wally through his nightmare, allowing him to wake up and, for the first time in his life, get him to work on time! Brilliant fun.



NOMAD

Another classic Ocean game gets the remake treatment, this time by TCK Soft. This update of the 1986 original features great 3D graphics and over 80 rendered rooms, each packed with guns, rockets, robots and certain death. The aim of the game is to infiltrate and destroy an evil intergalactic criminal network known as TALOS. Taking charge of the titular war droid, you must avoid the traps and obstacles in a bid to bring down Cyrus T. Gross, head of the TALOS organization. As with the original, learning how to control the droid is all part of the fun.

Scramble Chrome

Scramble Chrome from the prolific Smila is a tough and uncompromising version of the classic Konami shoot-em-up. Through careful use of the controls (they're sensitive man!), the object is to blast obstacles to clear the way forward and collect power-ups to improve your armory. You also need to replenish your fuel by blowing up the supply tanks as you see them – make sure you don't miss them, as the next tank could be a long way off. It may look pretty, but Scramble Chrome is as tough as old boots, representing a serious challenge for even the most hardened gamer.

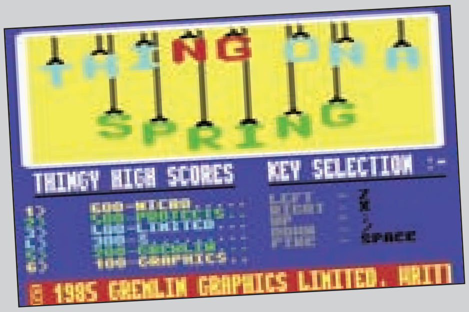
Arena runner

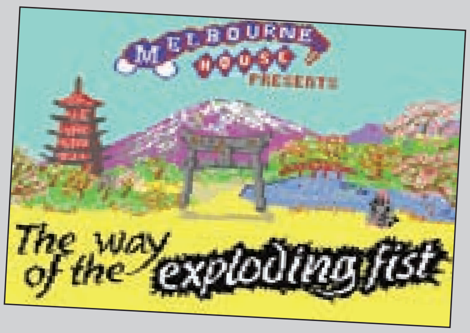
This game from Acoders is inspired by a Jeff Minter classic, the frantic Grid Runner. Viewed from a birds-eye perspective, you control a craft around an arena, and the idea is to switch on a set number of lights by passing over them to progress to the next level. It's not as easy as it sounds, as four moving cannons aim to destroy your craft and stop your progress. Arena Runner, like the original, is a triumph of gameplay over graphics, and a remake you shouldn't miss.



Audio track listing

In addition to games, the issue 4 coverdisc contains over 65 minutes of retro gaming music, compiled by Chris Abbott and Jason "Kenz" Mackenzie. There are 18 tracks in total – eight original C64 recordings, eight C64 remixes and a couple of bonus tracks. The music is CD quality and can be played in any standard CD player









C64 RECORDINGS

Track 1: Thing on a Spring

Written by Rob Hubbard. Originally released by Gremlin Graphics (1985).

The CD opens with perhaps the most influential track in 8-bit history. Not musically: even Rob himself considers this piece never quite had what it takes, but technically and sonically it was a revelation, and caused product managers all over the UK to play it to their musicians and say "I want something like that!". Supposedly written for £25. Of such legends is history made.

Track 2: Arkanoid

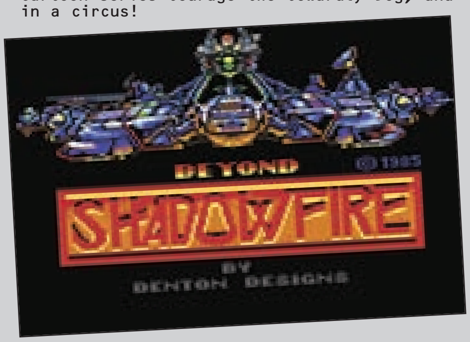
Written by Martin Galway. Originally released by Imagine (1987).

Originally appeared a year earlier in the Spectrum game Cobra, it hit fame by being the first commercial track to feature samples, narrowly beating Chris Huelsbeck. It also followed a trend where title tunes were added to games which didn't have them in the arcade. This was recorded directly from Martin Galway's own SID chip by Alistair "Boz" Bowness, chief behind Project Galway, a double CD set of C64 tunes recorded from Martin's own machine.

Track 3: Way of the Exploding Fist

Written by Neil Brennan. Originally released by Melbourne House (1985).

Featuring an amazing use of sound, this game sounded like nothing else. The piece itself is suspected of being a traditional Chinese tune, since it has been spotted in such diverse places as the EPCOT Centre, in the cartoon series Courage the Cowardly Dog, and in a circus!



Track 4: Delta

Written by Rob Hubbard. Originally released by Thalamus (1987).

The title tune was short, snappy and melodic, impressing many when it came out. In addition, its Glassian influences complemented the in-game music "Floydiness" and "Glassiness".

Track 5: Ocean Loader (version 1)

Written by Martin Galway. Originally released by Ocean Software (1985).

Long dismissed as a technically faulty version of the revised Ocean Loader – much to the chagrin of those who remember the original from Hypersports – this classic loader is "the fast one" before Martin's later reworking for Comic Bakery. As with Arkanoid, this tune is recorded from Martin Galway's own SID chip, but it didn't appear on the associated Project Galway CD set because version 2 was already there. Exclusive!

Track 6: Shadowfire

Written by Fred Gray. Originally released by Beyond Software (1985).

The first tune from any of the popular composers to be singled out and reviewed by Zzap 64, and a sound that no one had captured before, or indeed since. Fresh and sparkly, it made a humdrum game magical.

Track 7: Last Ninja

Written by Ben Daglish. Originally released by System 3 (1987).

The best known of the Last Ninja tunes, taken from the Wastelands level. The story goes that System 3 boss Mark Cale offered Ben Daglish a dodgy Mercedes in lieu of cash for payment – an offer that Ben politely refused!




Rob Hubbard


Ben Daglish


Martin Galway


David Whittaker


Fred Gray

C64 REMIXES

Track 8: Sanxion 2000

Written by Rob Hubbard. Originally released by Thalamus Interactive (1987). Remix performed by Chris Abbott and Moog.

An authentic cover of Rob Hubbard's seminal loading tune, with large portions of the original within it. The Jarre vocal effects come from another separate mix which was folded into this one by the Polish musician Moog. Taken from the CD Back in Time +.

Track 9: Wizball 2000

Written by Martin Galway. Originally released by Ocean Software (1987). Remix performed by Gareth "Tonka" Dolloway.

One of the most exciting Wizball dance mixes because it goes far beyond the original in terms of note cascades and melodic brightness. On the Back in Time 2 CD, from which this is taken, the remix quickly morphs into a Lara-Croft-esque underground melancholy orchestral lament. Here, you get a sound effect!

Track 10: Deflektor

Written by Ben Daglish. Originally released by Gremlin Graphics (1987). Remix performed by Reyn Ouwehand.

This is the sound Ben Daglish had in mind when he originally composed Deflektor, and he was astonished when Reyn appeared to read his musical mind perfectly to come up with this cover. Now forms an important part of the set of the new live C64 band Stuck in D'80s, of which Ben and Reyn are both founder members. From the Nexus 6581 CD.

Track 11: The Last V8

Written by Rob Hubbard. Originally released by Mastertronic (1986). Remix performed by Fabian Del Priore and Marcel Donne.

Hubbard goes Jarre on 45. This version is taken from the space concept album Back in Time 3, and forms the soundtrack to a mad chase through underground caverns before a ship blows up.



Track 12: Monty on the Run

Written by Rob Hubbard. Originally released by Gremlin Graphics (1985). Remix performed by Rob Hubbard, Chris Abbott and Alistair "Boz" Bowness.

Monty on the Run meets Scooby Doo was the brief for this one. Rob Hubbard plays piano, clav, and strings, Boz plays guitar, and Chris Abbott plays around. This track is the finale to the Karma64 CD, which is a pot-pourri of the most famous C64 tracks, and Return of the Mutant Camels!

Track 13: Glider Rider

Written by David Whittaker. Originally released by Mastertronic (1987). Remix performed by Markus Holler.

A dramatic remake of one of David Whittaker's most popular tunes. Remix64 was a CD which tried to remodel C64 music as if it had been performed by artists around in the 80s, hence the very traditional 80s sound.

Track 14: Comic Bakery

Written by Martin Galway. Originally released by Imagine Software (1986). Remix performed by Reyn Ouwehand.

Comic Bakery is Martin Galway's most famous tune, and one of the most covered. This version neatly combines devotion to the original and new sounds, to produce something nice and bouncy. Taken from the Galway Remixed CD.

Track 15: IK+

Written by Rob Hubbard. Originally released by System 3 (1987). Remix performed by Martin "Instant Remedy" Andersson.

IK+ is a tune Rob Hubbard hasn't any particularly fond memories of, but that doesn't stop it being one of his most popular tracks. Here is a very extended club mix by the C64 scene's premier dance remixer, Instant Remedy. From the Instant Remedy CD.

Track 16: Rambo First Blood Part II

Written by Martin Galway. Originally released by Ocean Software (1985). Remix performed by Marcel Donne.

To paraphrase the song: What if Jarre was one of us? Just a fan like one of us? Well, this track shows us just what would happen if Jarre had been a fan of C64 music and had done some covers of them. It's gloriously Equinoxe-like, and is built from the ground up - there are no samples from Jarre's work here because Marcel owns much of the same equipment as JMJ himself. Taken from the Sidologie CD.

BONUS TRACKS

Track 17: Feud (Amstrad version)

Written by David Whittaker. Originally released by Mastertronic (1987).

When David Whittaker first heard Master of Magic, Rob Hubbard's magnum opus (based on Synergy's Shibbolet from the album Audion), he was inspired to create his own tribute. Being Dave, of course, it came out more wibbly and on a lot more platforms than its forebear. A mysteriously thoughtful piece.

Track 18: LED Storm (Atari ST version)

Written by Tim Follin. Originally released by US Gold (1988).

Back in the day artists such as Tim Follin didn't think twice about composing different music for different versions of the same game. While the C64 version had a seminal tune whose lead riff was based on Smoke on the Water, this Atari ST tune was a lot less rocky and a lot more - Follin! Follin himself has said that all these cascades of notes were just typed into a text editor without a musical keyboard in sight, based as they were on mathematical progressions.

Like what you hear?

www.c64audio.com/theshop – check out the rest of the CD tracks!
www.hvsc.c64.org – refresh your ears with the original SID tunes, lovingly organised and kept up-to-date. Now over 24,000 files.
http://remix.kwed.org – free MP3s of C64 remixes in quantity. A voting system ensures you're not wasting too much bandwidth on the mediocre or worse.
www.remix64.com – don't just consume: review, chat and read interviews.
http://radio.c64.org – The only C64 remix radio station with regular live shows.
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eMag

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£6.80	£13.60	£27.80	£14.80	£29.60
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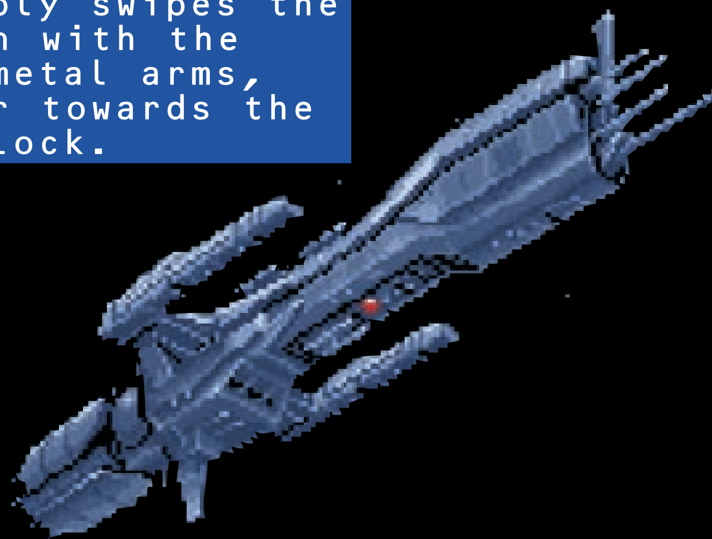
Endgame

In this issue, the satisfying climax to Konami's Aliens arcade game...





Strapped into the power loader, Riply swipes the Alien Queen with the machine's metal arms, pushing her towards the ship's airlock.



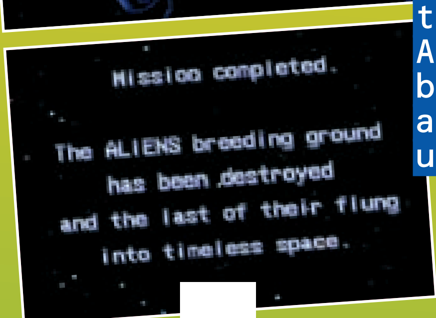




With the Queen's health diminished, Riply seizes the thrashing Alien and hoists her over the open airlock. The loader's vice-like grip loosens and the screaming Queen is sucked out of the ship.







With that the game is over, and the player is rewarded with some poorly translated text. All your breeding ground are belong to us...